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HARD LINES.

VOL. III.



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HARD LINES.

A Nobel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

"BREEZIE LANGTON," "SOCIAL SINNERS," "THE GREAT TONTINE,"

"AT FAULT," ETC. ETC.

"Of all the barbarous middle ages, that
Which is most barbarous is the middle age
Of man ; it is—I really scarce know what ;
But when we hover between fool and sage,
And don't know justly what we would be at—
A period something like a printed page,
Black letter upon foolscap, while our hair
Grows grizzled, and we are not what we were."

"The greatest miracle of love is the reformation of a coquette.

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. III.

LONDON : CHAPMAN AND HALL,
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HARD LINES.

CHAPTER I.

“BOOT AND SADDLE.”

SOME months have elapsed since Major Crymes so differed at Harrogate with the man from Manchester on the probabilities of war. There is no question about it now England is AT war. True, not a shot has been fired ; but the bray of martial music is incessant in her seaport towns as her soldiers hurry to the ships awaiting them ; the hammer clangs ceaselessly day and night in her dockyards and arsenals ; patriotic songs ring from every ale-house parlour, and her people are filled with the lust of carnage.

Amazing this to the Manchester school, who deemed the millennium commenced, and the art of throat-cutting falling into desuetude ; destined later to discover that production of cotton is not the chief end of life, nor calico the main luxury of nations.

All the vast mercantile marine of the Western Powers is laid under embargo, and other industries stand aside while the more important exportation of iron, humanity, and saltpetre is in hand. Where it is to go and what is to be done with it has not yet been determined in any way ; the plan of campaign not so much an object as to impress upon the Czar that England will not have it, that France will not have it, and that the sooner he and his Cossacks recross the Danube the better. Could the Emperor Nicholas have been made to understand this in the first instance, the Crimean war might never have been ; but the Czar had as much belief in the power of the Manchester school as Mr. Fulsby. Later

it was not likely that the Emperor of Russia could go back, and fighting became inevitable.

Radicals make wars and revolutions from failing to understand that the man who will not fight runs infinite danger of getting kicked, and that anarchy is not kept in check by verbiage.

If there was a man enthusiastic about the turn things had taken, it was Mr. Charrington. Like most Anglo-Indian officials, he had much antipathy to Russia, and infinite jealousy of the steady manner in which she was extending her sway through Central Asia. Like most men who have held high office in India, he was well up in her past history, and knew that whenever a born leader of men appeared among them, the hordes from Turkestan gravitated to the banks of the Helmund, and from thence swept down like hawks on the rich plains of Hindostan, the looting and ravaging of which was ever a tempting bait with which such a captain as Nadir Shah might attract

men to his standard. That it was Russia's destiny to lead such an invasion Mr. Charrington had no doubt whatever, and therefore considered any crippling of the Muscovite most desirable—an impression not altogether out of date in the present day.

It was one of those chill, grey March evenings, with a keen nor'-easter sweeping down the Ouse; the fall of one of those days when as Kingsley sings:

“Chime, ye dappled darlings,
Down the roaring blast;
You shall see a fox die
Ere an hour be past.”

The York and Ainsty had “carried a head” that morning, and the gallop been both fast and far; and in the billiard-room at Byculla Grange were now gathered many of our old friends who had taken part in the fray, enjoying all the luxury of tea, a pool before dinner, and a good gossip. Standing in front of the fire, and still in his boots, although he has doffed his red coat for a

plain velvet smoking-jacket, is Horace Crymes, engaged in conversation with his hostess. The house is full of guests, and Crymes and one or two of his brother-officers have come to dine and sleep ; for, as their hospitable host says, this is no weather to turn out after dinner, save in case of necessity.

“A life off blue!—who’s blue?” cries young Harperly, as still in his pink he leans over the table, and drops that cerulean-tinted ball artistically into the top pocket.

“I am. What a shame, Mr. Harperly ; I was regularly sold by yellow,” cried a pretty, fair-haired girl, laughing as she put down her sixpence.

“Perfectly true, Miss Danvers. Who’s yellow ? Why, Stratford ! Tell him he must advance you a florin to go on with, or you’ll be in the Bankruptcy Court. It was his reckless attempt to cut in the black left you over the hole. All right on the white.”

“You don’t hold me for half-a-crown,

Harry," cried Mr. Charrington, the proprietor of the ball in question.

"Done at once, sir, and in you go," rejoined the Cornet, suiting the action to the word. "I'll trouble you for three shillings—half-a-crown, and a tizzy for the life. Serves you right, Mr. Charrington, for trying to make a child like me nervous on his stroke."

"It strikes me, Master Harry, you're not likely to suffer much from that complaint," rejoined his host, laughing as he handed over his money. "But where's your sister?"

"She's a wee bit tired after her gallop, and thought she would lie down till dinner. She had her tea sent up to her,—thanks."

"It's a fact, I assure you," said Mrs. Charrington. "I had it in a letter I got yesterday from an old friend of mine who is in that presidency, and knows all that Deccan country well."

"It seems almost incredible. He seemed so thoroughly in earnest fifteen months ago.

I can hardly believe in his forgetting Miss Aysgarth so soon,” replied Crymes, quietly.

“Can’t you indeed,” said his hostess with a mocking twinkle in her eye. “I could imagine you, for instance, forgetting most of us in the same time. But joking apart, I have heard of this Mrs. Daventry before. I never saw her, but I am told she is a very pretty woman, and that anyhow she is one of those women your sex all go mad about. That is a thing that has puzzled me as it has puzzled many of my sisters, and doubtless will to the end of time. I have seen you all wild about women who were certainly in my eyes neither good-looking nor well-dressed. Clever, I presume, they were, but wherein their fascination lay was hard to see. I believe you are a good deal like sheep, and bow down in adoration because some bell-wether of mark has thought fit to kneel at the shrine. There are men in London, I fancy, could establish a Hottentot in such place did they choose.”

“There is something in what you say,”

rejoined the Major, laughing; "but is Calvert very deeply smitten with this Mrs. Daventry?"

"He's never away from her side. Daventry is a complaisant husband, who takes his own way, and recognizes his wife's privilege under such circumstances of doing likewise. She, from all accounts, is a woman who takes care never to be without an *attaché* to administer *les petits soins* for which she can't depend upon her husband. At least such is what my informant tells me, and I have heard strange stories of Mrs. Daventry and her triumphs before, mind."

"There is nothing very strange in a man becoming the slave of a pretty woman," rejoined Crymes; "especially in India, where the monotony of life notoriously disposes men to fall in love with other people's property."

"Ah," replied Mrs. Charrington, laughing, "it's a country would have rather suited you. But I shall leave you; it's

pretty nearly time to begin dressing for dinner.”

“Well, Crymes,” said the host, as, billiard-cue in hand, he lounged up to the fire-place, “I wish you could tackle our Manchester friend of last year now. By Jove! he’d put you down with Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the rest of ’em. You’ll come off as a prophet, and no mistake. If you are good to open your oracular lips with regard to Epsom, I for one shall pay much attention to your words of wisdom.”

“Yes,” said the Major, smiling, “I should like to catch Mr. Fulsby again, and ask him where Manchester opinion is now. As for Epsom, all I know is, there will be a great falling off in attendance as regards the military element.”

“Yes, I suppose so; and we shall then, unlike Fulsby, admit we could have better spared better men. There was wont to be a surrounding of lobsters, prawns, champagne, and strawberries, about the soldiers that was

very genial in hot, dusty times, when one was backing losers," said Mr. Charrington, almost plaintively. "I've had many a good lunch on the drags opposite the stand."

"And washed down many a reverse, no doubt," rejoined Crymes, as the dressing-gong rung out its demoniacal strains.

Now it was not to be supposed that such a piece of gossip as Mrs. Charrington had come by would be long before it pervaded the whole house. The hostess had honestly, as she said, received the news in a letter from India, but the story was not likely to lack colour in her hands, and as we know pretty well warranted any embroidery Mrs. Charrington could give it. That it should not only come to Miss Aysgarth's ears, but be openly talked about before her was only natural. More than a year had elapsed since Cis Calvert had left York; and though his flirtation with Annie Aysgarth had been currently spoken about at the time, it was now pretty well forgotten,

while those who fancied there was considerably more in it than mere flirtation were few, and had kept their own counsel.

That Annie listened outwardly unmoved to the idle chatter about how Captain Calvert had fallen into the toils of a celebrated Anglo-Indian siren, need scarcely be said ; and in the first instance it was with tolerably tranquil incredulity. But that constant dripping which wears the stone extends also to our beliefs. It has been said that if you have only the opportunity to drum any plausible story continuously into the heads of your fellow-creatures, you must be exceeding wanting in eloquence if twenty per cent. of them at least, in a short time, do not place implicit faith in your recital. Similarly, however much you may disbelieve a bit of gossip in the first instance, if you find it constantly repeated and generally accepted as true, it's odds, unless you are more strong-minded than humanity generally, that you also assent to

it. Gradually Annie began to feel excessively unhappy over this story. Once more she recalled to mind that Cis had never answered that letter of hers, and argued that if he really loved her he had no business to consider her released from her engagement to him when she had distinctly told him she would stand to it, and disbelieved all that was said against him. She thought, and justly too, that if she had courage to write to him, the least he could do was to gladly accept such correspondence. It was impossible she could conceive the morbid view Cis had taken of his own misfortune. Not one man in a hundred would have been so keenly sensitive to the slur cast upon his honour as Calvert; few regular racing men indeed have not at some time or another in their career had to stand the brunt of some such unfounded attack. Cis was no regular turfite; had he been so, he'd been less sensitive to unjust accusation. Men whose turf life has been summed up at

its finish as irreproachable have nevertheless passed through the time when mud was thrown at them—thrown at them for no just cause, but simply by an unreasoning crowd who had lost their money, as had probably the luckless owner who kept horses for their amusement. Then again, Harry had not heard from him lately, and to a girl in Annie Aysgarth’s frame of mind, that offered additional corroboration of Mrs. Charrington’s story. How the girl wished this visit was over; for although they lived but a few miles off, they had come to spend the week, after the cheery north-country fashion. As for her brother, Major Crymes, and one or two more of the Lancers, they oscillated between the Grange and the barracks, sleeping in these latter when exigencies compelled, or occasionally spending the morning there under similar compulsion.

Prepossessed though Annie had originally been against Horace Crymes, she had most undoubtedly overcome that feeling now.

She had seen a good deal of the Major of late, and nothing could have exceeded his tact and deferential courtesy. His attentions were never so marked as to alarm her, but still he never failed to accord her that pronounced homage which men rarely pay except to women they both admire and esteem. He had commenced his pursuit of the banker's daughter a little from pique, but far more because his affairs were in such desperate case that he saw no hope for him but a wealthy marriage. The outburst of war made things still more critical in that respect. Creditors had already shown themselves wondrous keen for a settlement before their military clients departed in pursuit of glory, and Crymes knew that soon as the regiment was under orders the pressure would be overwhelming. But it must be also said in his behalf, that with whatever motive he had commenced his courtship—if such it can yet be called—he was now honestly in love with the girl for herself, and

nervously anxious for the success of his suit. Rarely when a man is, so to speak, with his back to the wall, does fortune befriend him. She is a capricious jade, more wont to smile on the well-to-do than interfere on behalf of the gambler playing for his last stake. But though she has deserted him of late, Horace Crymes had ever been one of her favoured children, and she comes to his aid once more in curious fashion.

One morning, at Byculla Grange, a letter with a broad black border is brought up to the Major's room, by which he is informed that an uncle from whom he had really no expectations had departed this life, and left him between three and four thousand a year. The old gentleman happened to be of a most tetchy, irritable, dictatorial disposition. He had quarrelled with all the nephews whom he had to stay with him on probation, owing to their utter inability to tolerate his unbearable temper. Disliking the nephew he had never seen somewhat

less than the nephews he had, and impressed by the fact that the Major had never either wanted anything from him or evinced the slightest disposition to cultivate his acquaintance, the old man determined to make him his heir—fortified further in this resolution by the thought of the surprise and heart-burning it would create among the rest of the family.

“By heaven, what a piece of luck!” muttered the Major as he mastered the contents of the letter, and sprang out of bed. “How right I was never to go near old Tom Dowling! I always told my cousins visiting him would be neither profitable nor pleasant; that the contents of his will, like a pawnbroker’s shop, would consist chiefly of unredeemed pledges. However, I must leave this at once; it’s a bore; but when a man leaves one near on four thousand a year, the least one can do is to attend his funeral.”

Breakfast over, Crymes briefly explained

to Mrs. Charrington the necessity for his immediate departure, and the good fortune that had befallen him, and then proceeded at once to barracks to arrange for a short leave.

“Best cut things as short as you can, Crymes,” said the colonel. “I take it the ball’s begun in earnest, and it’s not likely we shall be left out of the dance.”

“I trust not. I must go down to this funeral, and shall probably be detained a few days on other business connected with my inheritance, or else I wouldn’t ask you to spare me now ; but you may depend upon my not taking an hour’s more leave than I am obliged.”

“Good-bye,” replied Copplestone, as he shook hands. “This time next year may you command the regiment and I a brigade.”

“Oh *vive la guerre, cigars and cognac*,” rejoined Crymes, quoting the refrain of a popular ballad of those days. “Good-bye, sir.”

The late Thomas Dowling had lived in a pretty villa residence, close to Tunbridge Wells. He was no landed proprietor; some thirty acres of grass and ornamental grounds constituting his lordship; while the remainder of his property was comfortably invested in stocks, railways, and such securities. No inheritance could have been more convenient to a man in Crymes' position, as it was easy to realize almost at once sufficient to extricate him from his difficulties. He mused, as he sped southwards, much over his change of position, but chiefly how it would affect him with regard to Miss Aysgarth. He knew, of course, that there was not a soul at Byculla Grange by this time unaware that he had come into a considerable property. He had no motive for imposing secrecy on Mrs. Charrington, and if he had, would have saved her from temptation by not telling her of his good fortune. Miss Aysgarth would be at all events compelled to regard him as perfectly

disinterested in seeking her hand, and that when you're in earnest is something. The difficulty he foresaw was the war. He was far too keen a soldier not to hail with exultation the prospect of at last seeing the “real thing” after fifteen years of garrison life in the United Kingdom, but he was also much too good a judge of the situation not to know that England would have to put every regiment she could lay her hands on in the field. This of course meant that the —th would speedily get their orders for the East, and then came the question—What was he to do? To speak now he felt would be premature; and yet he did not like to start on this campaign without having at least made Miss Aysgarth clearly understand he was a pretender to her hand. As he had forecast the war the year before, so did Crymes now believe that it was no insignificant struggle to which the allies were committed. History told all who loved to read what tremendous power of resistance Russia had

invariably displayed when put upon the defensive. Formidable in attack, she was trebly formidable when the object *of* attack, and could point to a long record of those who had driven their heads against the wall when venturing on violation of her territory. No ; war with Russia meant no mere summer campaign, but probably a couple of years' hard fighting or more once she and the allies really came to blows, and it was evident now to all clear-headed men that England was in no more humour to receive concessions than Russia to make them. Individuals made war in the past—monarchs, ministers, ambassadors. It is nations make war in these days, and Louis Napoleon had no more to do with the Franco-Prussian war than the late Czar of Russia with the last fierce spring of the Muscovite at the throat of the Moslem.

Horace Crymes, however, was a practical man, and knew that his immediate business was to bury his uncle, settle all law business

connected with his inheritance as far as possible, and hurry back to York. Quite time enough to make up his mind about what he was to say to Miss Aysgarth when the “rout” came; for that it behoved him to postpone speaking till the last moment was a point on which Crymes felt very clear.

He ran up to the Colonel’s rooms to report himself on his return, and found that warrior much exercised in his mind.

“It’s devilish odd, you know; but why we don’t get our marching ticket, Crymes, I can’t make out. D—mme, if we’re not fit to go I should like to know the corps that is; and it is a thundering shame if we’re to be left kicking our heels about here when they must know, if they know anything, that they haven’t half cavalry enough with the army.”

Coppleston was a grand enthusiast about his own branch of the service, and believed implicitly that he could take his own regiment anywhere, and that Russian

infantry squares would collapse like brown paper if ridden at by British dragoons.

“Deuced little fear of our turn not coming,” replied Crymes. “I’ve made arrangements while away to get rid of all my racing stud, and mean to clear out all I’ve got here except old Cockatoo, my second charger, that brown horse, and the Cid. I sent the latter into the school a month back.”

“Yes ; and a rare charger he’ll make you. Take my advice and leave old Cockatoo behind ; a good horse, but a terrible colour for campaigning ; kill your best man to keep him decent for parade.”

Colonel Coppleston was not long kept in suspense, for ere the week was out arrived the order for the regiment to proceed to Woolwich, from whence they were to embark for the East, and the —th Lancers were jubilant as their brethren before them at the idea of a turn of active service. Little they reck as they gather round their

mess-table for the last time previous to the plate being sent to the custody of their bankers what gaps there will be round the board when they next reassemble, and that the Queen's health once disposed of, they will be called on to drink silently to their comrades sleeping peacefully on the plain of Balaklava.

CHAPTER II.

“A DIPLOMATIC QUESTION.”

THE —th were given scant time in which to say “Good-bye.” Farewell visits had to be paid hurriedly, and proffered “God-speed” entertainments had to be declined.

At the time of which I am writing the army was in great repute. It was a very long while since we had indulged in the luxury of a big European war, and the nation generally was a little delirious over it, so that not only private persons, but public corporations were keen upon entertaining their soldiers. I can remember the landlord of a famous Bristol hostelry drawing his crack bin of equally famous old port

for our delectation as we passed through on our way to the war, and indignantly declining the idea that it should be noted in the bill, and think sorrowfully to this day how thrown away it must have been upon palates accustomed to that fiery fortified combination that did duty as such around the hospitable boards of the army. It is melancholy to reflect upon, one of those anomalies that make one suspect a flaw in the ordering of things, but the appreciation of port comes to us just as the capability of indulging in it has departed. The best judges of that grandest of wines are those who dare no longer drink it. Inexcusable digression you call this ! Not altogether. The days when you could drink port, or you liked it, were those in which “all the world was young, lad,” and if we are not allowed to sorrow over that past spring-time, about what is it worth while to make moan ?

Crymes knew now that his tale had to be told ; there was no help for it. Premature

it was in his judgment to speak as yet, but he thought it would be still more hazardous to leave York without avowing his hopes; and then he pondered a little on whether he had best speak to Julian Harperley or his daughter. Under other circumstances it would never have occurred to Crymes to hesitate upon such a point. "Get the girl's yes to your love tale," he was wont to say, "and a fig for all parents and guardians; it's want of starch in your own system if you can't infuse sufficient obstinacy and insubordination into a woman who loves you. The weakest woman will show plenty of determination given two things,—a lover with a strong will, and opportunity to see him frequently." But the difficulty here was, would he get a yes to his love-tale, and albeit little given to lack of confidence in affairs of this nature, Horace Crymes felt very dubious on that point. No man had more implicit reliance in the doctrine of *il faut se faire valoir* than himself, but there

are times when we feel intuitively that we shall fail to command the top price in the market, and this it was made Crymes muse over whether it would not be prudent in the first place to open the trenches with the banker himself. Parental sanction might count for something, he thought; and situated as he was now, he might fairly reckon on Julian Harperley's approval; but then he reflected that Miss Aysgarth was of an age when a young woman usually takes her fate into her own hands, if she has any character at all, and he thoroughly comprehended that Miss Aysgarth both could and would think for herself in such a matter. No; he thought he must speak to Annie, and if possible avert a positive rejection. That Horace Crymes was very earnest in his love is sufficiently obvious by his being apprehensive on this point; for there was never a man more given to confidence in his wooing than he.

One afternoon in the early April weather

he sauntered over to the Firs on old Cock-
atoo, to say good-bye, and put, as he said to
himself, his fate to the test. He had turned
it over in his own mind with much delibera-
tion, and resolved that unless things looked
most decidedly adverse he would speak out
to Miss Aysgarth.

“Odd,” he muttered, as he dropped the
reins on the old horse’s neck, “I’ve done
plenty of love-making in my time, and my
tongue never faltered ; yet here I am, going
to avow the honestest love I ever felt, and
standing in a worldly point of view in a
much better position than I have ever so far
done, and I feel as if speech would fail me.
But what is there in this girl that I should
dread tell her I love her ? Yes, that is just
it ; I *do* love her, and never was thoroughly
in earnest before.”

Crymes sent in his name, and was duly
informed that Miss Aysgarth was at home.
He found her seated in a low chair by the
fire. On a table by her side were spread out

a couple of maps, and some books and papers lay strewn on the carpet at her feet. She smiled as she welcomed him.

“Oh, Major Crymes,” she exclaimed, “you remember the retort of one of my sex to the great Napoleon, when he told her women had no business to study politics: ‘Excuse me, General, but when you men cut off our heads, we may be pardoned for feeling curious to know why you do it.’ Like her, now you men have determined to fight, we women are anxious to know *when* you mean to do it.”

“Are those our maps of the Principalities, Crimea, European Turkey, &c.?”

“Yes; and here,” she said, placing her finger on Varna, “is apparently where you will eventually all collect. I beg pardon, concentrate is the correct word, is it not?”

“Yes,” replied Crymes, gravely. “I don’t pretend to know where the fight will ultimately come off, but rest assured, Miss

Aysgarth, that it will not be there. The Russian is already foiled in his spring at Constantinople, and will wait now for us to take the initiative. At what our military directors will hurl us no one can say ; but they are bound to try something. Spite of appearances, it can never all end in demonstration, or the bombardment of Cronstadt. Land fortifications always should beat ships, and the navy are little likely to do much harm to either that or Sweabourg."

"Odd," she replied, "I never regarded it in that light. I thought you were all assembling here," and once more she placed her finger on the map, "and that Russia would have to beat you before she continued her march on Constantinople."

"No, Miss Aysgarth ; without the slightest disparagement to the Muscovite, I fancy he will content himself with standing on the defensive. It is simply ordinary prudence to await the assault when you deem yourself weaker than your adversary."

“And that we shall proceed to extremities you don’t doubt?” she inquired.

“I certainly think we are on the verge of a big war. We are the one nation in Europe that always shuts its eyes to that possibility. The long peace since the wars of Napoleon has been simply the result of utter exhaustion. All this talk of an appeal to arms being impossible in these days of advanced civilization is mere balderdash. Men and nations are as quarrelsome as ever they were. Humanity is unchangeable, civilization a mere fashion; and fashion, when the masses are stirred, has about as much to say to it as packthread would have to the guidance of whales.”

“It will be weary times for us women who have those near and dear to us away in the strife. I hardly realize it as yet; a twelve-month ago, when Harry got his commission, that I should feel uneasy about him seemed a very remote possibility; and

now we shall be shortly watching for every mail with feverish interest."

"I hope that you will not feel quite indifferent to the fate of the rest of us, Miss Aysgarth," observed Crymes in a low voice.

"No, indeed," she replied quickly, as her eyes flashed full on him. "I know you all and most of you intimately. I should be terribly grieved to hear evil tidings of the regiment, or that any of you individually had come to any sort of trouble. No one will follow your fortunes with keener interest than myself."

"I am going to ask you to take special interest in me," rejoined Crymes. "I have a superstition that those you watch over and care for will come home safe and sound again."

"You superstitious, Major Crymes!" she replied, laughing. "I should never have thought that of you. But," she continued, more seriously, "I know very well if this turn out such a war as you anticipate, some of

you will never see England again. You and I have been great friends of late, and I'm sure you cannot doubt that I should be sincerely grieved to hear that any harm had befallen you.”

“Great friends! and is there no possibility of our being more than that to each other? You must have known—because women always do know these things—that I have loved you for the last six months or more.”

“Hush!” interposed Annie, quickly. “Do not fall into any mistake, Major Crymes. Friends of course we are; staunch ones; and I shall always follow your fortunes with the greatest interest, believe me.”

“I would be something more than that,” he rejoined, in quiet resolute fashion. “Stop! hear me out before you make any answer. It is little for a man to ask that you should listen to his tale, and more might never have been told you did I not

think there was strong justification for my speaking. I have loved you very dearly for some time, but feared to put my fortune to the test. You may guess perhaps why. What was current scandal a fortnight ago at Byculla unsealed my lips. The reason I left the Grange, of which you are doubtless aware, gave me full warranty to speak to any woman of marriage. I came into a good three thousand a year by my uncle's will, and consequently am no longer compelled to sue like most of us soldiers—*in formâ pauperis*.

It might have been fancy, but Annie could not help thinking that she could detect a covert smile at Calvert's circumstances in the concluding words of Crymes' speech, carefully as he had avoided bringing Cis's name into the conversation. If she was angry and mistrustful of this far-away lover of hers, she was not prepared to hear him run down by others, and quite ready to champion him when she could do so discreetly. She

snatched at the opening Crymes had given, and bending her head haughtily retorted :

“ You do me too much honour, sir ; but this poor hand is not for sale as yet.”

“ You know that is not what I mean. You are wilfully misunderstanding me,” he replied quietly. “ Men of the world are bound to assure the ladies they hope to make their wives that they can maintain them in all the ease and comfort they have been accustomed to. I know you much too well to think that my banker’s account would influence your decision. I know that I am asking prematurely perhaps, but I could not leave England without telling you this.”

“ And why would you ?” she cried vehemently. “ I tried to prevent you ; to tell you it was—”

“ There will have been a good many such stories told these last few weeks,” he interposed quickly. “ Men always do speak out just when they ought not. And yet I don’t know. I heard of a girl the other day, who,

when her relations were angrily abusing a luckless admirer for declaring himself under the circumstances, flamed out, and said it would be a consolation if anything happened to him to know that he had loved her. Miss Aysgarth," he continued, rising, "I have come to say good-bye. I don't ask for an answer now; I may never ask for an answer; but it will be a comfort to me in time of need to remember that I have told you my story."

"But, Major Crymes," she exclaimed, "I cannot let you go under any impression—"

"I go under no impression that a word from your lips could alter," he interrupted. "Good-bye." He pressed the hand warmly and was gone.

He had told his love tale, and Annie Aysgarth, unwilling as she had been to listen to it, was fain to confess he had told it well. She did not care for this man, but she felt that his love was not to be scoffed at. With his tall, wiry figure, and dark

resolute face, he was the *beau ideal* of a *sabreur*, and she was conscious of a dogged determination about him that made it rash to assume he would fail in anything he had set his mind upon. She had seen one or two instances of her own sex succumbing in the end to men of this stamp, much as they had ridiculed the idea to begin with ; and these successful wooers had been neither as good-looking nor well endowed as Major Crymes. Was she faltering in her allegiance ? If she was who could blame her ? Not a line had she received for months from Cis Calvert ; and such tidings of him as had reached her ears were hardly calculated to strengthen her constancy. This Indian scandal, which though not directly told her, was continually buzzed into her ears, was hard to fight against. A girl strong in the assurance of her lover's truth, with letters occasionally from him to show that she still holds the first place both in his heart and his memory, can endure much, but when her letters are unanswered,

and the rumour comes to her from afar that this admirer of hers is enthralled by another woman, her belief falters. The sex are wont to be a little merciless to one another upon these occasions ; it may not be deliberate malignity, but women are not specially considerate of a sister's feelings upon these occasions. No one told Annie Aysgarth outright of her lover's inconstancy, but over and over again during that wretched week at Byculla Grange it was discussed, though perhaps unintentionally, in her hearing. Every now and again she was doomed to suffer that deep humiliation to a proud passionate woman—the commiseration concerning the way her lover had treated her, and only a woman can understand the bitterness of tasting of that cup. That her love affairs may go wrong is hard enough to bear ; it means so infinitely more to the woman than to the man.

“Love is of man's life a thing apart ; 'tis woman's whole existence.”

Let this story be true or let it be false, the one fact remained—Cis Calvert had returned no reply to her last letter. Her father had thrown cold water upon the idea of her marriage, but she had stood resolutely by her lover. Surely if she firmly refused to give up their correspondence, it was not for him to renounce it! The plea that he could not allow her to link her fortunes to a broken man, if she choose to waive, hardly became him, if he loved her, to advance. She had told him that her belief in him was unshaken, that she would stand by him in his hour of trouble as a true woman always does; and God help the man who cannot believe in such! But it was hard—aye, infinitely hard—to have the precious spikenard rejected; to find that this man, upon whom she had lavished all the wealth of her love, had so soon forgotten her that his infatuation for another woman was already a current Indian scandal. And now, strange to say, another lover was at

her feet, a man who much more nearly represented her *beau idéal* of that possible husband of whom every young girl dreams. They don't marry these shadowy phantoms any more than men marry the visionary perfection which sweeps across their boyish imagination. Fitzgerald's ballad perhaps describes these withered leaves of youthful fancy as well as anything :

“ There are names that we cherish, tho' nameless,
For aye on the lips they may be ;
There are hearts that, tho' fettered, are tameless,
And thoughts unexpress'd, but still free !
And some are too grave for a rover,
And some for a husband too light ;—
The ball and my dream are all over—
Good-night to thee, lady, good-night ! ”

It must not be for one moment imagined that Annie Aysgarth actually wavered in her love for Cis, but when a man to all appearance completely neglects his *fiancée*, and all she can hear of him is that he is dangling at the skirts of another woman, and when another suitor, not only good-

looking but well to do in the world, presses himself on her acceptance, she may well ask herself whether this former lover was really worthy of the affection she had bestowed on him. And that was precisely the feeling that began to steal into Annie Aysgarth's mind as she looked sadly back at the march of events. The idea of wedding Major Crymes never crossed her mind, and yet she knew that many a girl in Yorkshire would gladly welcome that swart, handsome Lancer, with his three thousand a year, as a wooer. He was good-looking, and emphatically a man, and could undoubtedly give a right good home to whatever woman he led to the altar. Nobody could see all this more readily than clear-headed, practical Annie Aysgarth. She knew, as has happened scores of times before, that from a worldly point of view she had much better take the well-to-do lover who knelt at her feet, than the broken scapegrace whose very passion for her seemed now open to question.

But our feelings are not always under our own control. Human nature is about the one thing upon the immutability of which we can rely ; and love has upset prudence since the world began.

Annie Aysgarth was in truth having a hard time of it just now. She might not want to marry Major Crymes, but he and several others of the —th Lancers had been intimates at the Firs ; and though she as yet hardly realized it, she had gathered quite enough from Crymes to know that this was no mere military promenade they were embarked upon. Women cannot help feeling a little heartsick on such occasions. Granted he is no more than a favourite ball-room partner, the thought that they may be pressing his hand for the last time makes their hearts wondrous tender to those who are going forth to do battle for England. Besides, had she not an actual brother going forth in their ranks, a brother of whom too she was very fond, and from

whom this was to be her first separation in earnest? She had of course lost sight of him for short intervals in his public school days, but since he had buckled a sabre it had been his luck to be quartered within a mile or so of his own home, and she had naturally seen him continually. But when those starting for the East might return was a very open question, and one about which no sensible man would even venture a conjecture. There were not wanting those who at this moment did not believe that a shot would be fired on either side; plenty of people about only the other day pooh-poohing the idea of the bombarding Alexandria, or the despatching the army to Egypt. These things always are so. Nations, like men, don't quarrel deliberately, but drift into their differences; and nothing is perhaps so conducive to the arguments of violence as the persuasion of one combatant that the other will not fight.

In fact, Annie Aysgarth had nothing

before her but the prospect of that weary waiting, destined to be the lot of so many women during those days. Happy were those whose dear ones came safe back to them, and who were spared the finding of their name in those ghastly returns of killed and wounded only too frequent in the columns of the *Times* before that little matter of the Chersonese was decided !

CHAPTER III.

“THE SWAGGER OF WAR.”

ATTIRED in braided pelisse, from beneath the top of which peeped out a gold-laced collar, while below it were to be seen gold-laced overalls thrust into high riding-boots with armed heels, and with a cavalry sabre under his arm, Cis Calvert might be seen one November day picking his way through the dirty streets that lead from Tophana to Pera. He looked jaded and wearied, and as if so far he had met neither the excitement nor the oblivion that he craved for. He had no regret for the Indian career he had so abruptly abandoned; he did not like his regiment, and bitterly resented their not

standing by him in his hour of need ; and then again he remembered the complication with Mrs. Daventry was getting almost beyond his control. There are no doubt men impassive to the fascinations and avowed love of a pretty woman as there are cabbages ; but I fancy these stoics will have but a gloomy record to look back upon, and that the memories of twenty love scrapes are better than that of the ledger which shows no such entry. Cis had sought to dissipate his *ennui* by a flirtation with Mrs. Daventry in the first instance ; but the lady had apparently caught the spirit of the land of her adoption, and intended a love affair with all the volcanic violence of the East.

As he steamed away from Bombay, ruefully reflecting that he was once more the hero of an ugly turf scandal, Cis could not but call to mind that far sadder day when he had left the station at York. His old Lancer brethren had stood to him like men

in his first trouble, but his new corps had looked askance when scandal waxed wicked with his name. Cis did not reflect that in the —th Lancers he was both well known and popular, while in the Royal Dunbars he was neither. Yes; leaving the latter and the fierce love of Mrs. Daventry was a relief; the saying adieu to his old dragoon brethren and sweet Annie Aysgarth had been an agony. Should he ever see her again? Better not. With his wretched Indian story on the top of the Yorkshire offending, how could he ever hope to approach her again? It was hard that he should always be the scapegoat. Still it was possible to make some sort of name, show there was stuff in him, and clear the smirched scutcheon which he at present bore, however innocently, in the great drama about to be enacted.

When Cis arrived at Constantinople the main body of the allied army was round and about Varna, while the cavalry were

using up their men and horses in that useless promenade in the Dobruska ; but it was evident to every one that the allies were bound to do something, and, in fact, had only concentrated their forces preliminary to striking a blow, though in what direction that blow would be aimed was as yet a profound secret. Cis's anxiety to get military employment at once was such that he jumped at a commission in the Bashi-Bazouks, that "refuge of sinners" as it was often laughingly called in consequence of numbering amongst its officers no inconsiderable number of "the broken brigade," who, like Martha's husband in Faust,—

"Lov'd women too, and had for wine a thirst,
Besides their passion for those dice accurst."

Most of the friends who might have helped him were away in Bulgaria, and afraid to be out of the fray he was glad to take the first thing that offered. Beatson, of Beatson's horse, was a name of mark in India, and Cis had fair reason to suppose

such a well-known leader of irregular cavalry would be speedily found work for his command. Whether the material he met with proved past his kneading, or what might be the reason, the writer knows not, but certain it is, that the Bashi-Bazouks, from whom at one time great things were expected, were never heard of in the Crimean business after the work began. It was curious too, for in their early days they were pronounced just the fellows to tackle the Cossacks. It was true that the experts who then so freely expressed their opinion had never seen a Cossack nor a shot fired in anger, but there was a period of enlightenment before them, and before many months some of these critics had cut their way through the children of the Don at Balaklava and witnessed the red rain of Inkerman. Since Cleopatra led the stampede of Actium the Egyptians have always run away, but the Russians were made of very different stuff, and the Crimean men won their scanty

laurels in very different fashion from the triple-crowned heroes of the twenty-five minutes' fight at Tel-el-Kebir.

Poor Cis, he chafed with impatience when the news came down of the landing in the Crimea and the defeat of Menschikoff on the Alma. When were they to get their orders? When were Beatson and his wild troopers to take their part in the dance? Then came the terrible account of Balaklava, and the well-nigh annihilation of the Light Brigade. Surely they must be wanted now. Every sabre that could be raised must be required at the front after such a disaster as that! Splendid as the charge was, famous as it is still, and will be for all time in song and story, that it was one of those costly deeds of derring-do which it is not meet to exult about there was no denying. Yet no order came for the Bashi-Bazouks to embark for the front. Cis's heart sickened. He had come here for "the real thing," to take his share of the work, and found himself

knocking about Constantinople and its vicinity much as a man quartered at Aldershot might be seen about London and Greenwich in the season. Every time he went up from Gallipoli to the capital he felt ashamed of his gaudy, untarnished splendour as he encountered the many weather-stained uniforms which characterized the invalids from the front; men wounded at Alma or Inkerman, or to whom the wet, cold, and severe starvation of the trenches had tried past endurance. Cis might well look faded and wearied as he picked his way through the mud and filth of Galata on a louring day towards the end of November; he could not but feel that the cards were running persistently against him. As if the York scrape had not been black enough, he knew he had left the Royal Dunbars with the reputation of having stood in with two of the most notorious “practitioners” in the Presidency in about as shameful a turf robbery as the

Presidency had ever witnessed. He had himself endorsed his fault in the second case as he had in the first, by flying from the scandal, although influenced by very different motives. His own thoughts were torture to him ; he felt that Annie Aysgarth was further removed from him than ever. If her father had deemed that miserable steeplechase cause to demur against him as a son-in-law, what would he say when the distorted story of the Nizam's Plate reached his ears ? Poor Cis, he longed for work ; he longed to be where shot were flying and sabres ringing. His blood had tingled, as every soldier's of England had, when he read Russell's soul-stirring accounts of the death-ride of Balaklava ; of the long, stubborn, dogged stand at Inkerman ; and here he was kicking his heels about the camp at Gallipoli or the dirty streets of Constantinople. He might as well, he mused grimly, have been listening to the band on the Meidan at Secunderabad.

Full of his own sad thoughts, despite being once or twice nearly knocked down by hamals, trotting blindly along under their monstrous burdens, Cis reached the top of the hill, and turning into the main street was making his way towards Misseri's Hotel when he ran across a stalwart man of medium stature, bearded like a pard, and habited in a rough pea-jacket, long boots, and a forage-cap, the scarlet band of which had acquired a tint that could be likened to nothing but the skirts of a hunting-coat at the expiration of a second wet season. The inhabitant of the pea-jacket stopped, gazed steadfastly at the gaily-attired warrior who confronted him, and then exclaimed :

“Cis Calvert, by all that's whimsical ! How are you, old man ? And what on earth induced you to enrol yourself in the ‘Pillagers’ ? Rather rough to dub them so, ain't it, considering they hav'n't had a chance yet ?”

“Jerry Arkwright, isn't it ?—though a

fellow may be excused having doubts about your personality behind all that hair. How are you, old man? I saw your name was mentioned in despatches about the Inker-man day, and d—n it, every one of you deserved it. By the way, you were hit, weren't you?"

"Yes; that's the reason you see me down here now. It wasn't much, but our doctor shipped me off sharp, saying, 'You'll come round quicker below than you will up here, if only because you can get decent food and bottled stout.' I shall be going back in another three weeks or so, and in the meantime there seems a lull. Inkerman has pacified both sides for a little, just, Cis, as in our old Harrow days a good stand-up fight kept two fellows who were always jarring quiet for the half-year."

"Ah, both sides too exhausted to go on, I suppose?"

"Well," rejoined Arkwright gravely, "it is to be hoped *they* are, but there's no doubt

whatever about us. I don't, from what I know, think we've another Inkerman left in us just now. The only comfort is the loser in such an awful slogging fight as that was don't usually want any more for some time. But here we are at Misseri's; come in and have some dinner.”

“Just what I proposed doing. A talk with you'll do me good, Jerry, although I'm almost ashamed to be seen with you.”

“Well, I'm not much to look at,” grinned Arkwright. “I hardly look up to the mark for a *levée* at St. James', I know; and don't you think I've got any evening togs to get into, old man. I'm not proprietor of much more than I stand in, and the essentials are more looked to than the ornamental up there, I tell you.”

“You misunderstand me,” replied Cis bitterly, and with a contemptuous glance at his own gay attire. “I'm ashamed of all this tinsel being paraded alongside a uniform stained with the smoke of Inkerman.”

“The Crimea’s bad for clothes,” replied Arkwright, sententiously; “but hang it all, why ain’t you with us up there instead of kicking about here got up for a Queen’s Ball?”

“It’s a little rough,” rejoined Cis. “You know, or perhaps don’t know, I left the —th Lancers and joined the Royal Dunbars in India. I sold out of that regiment and came straight here to volunteer for anything might be going. I was offered a troop in these Bashi-Bazouks of Beatson’s and jumped at it. I thought they’d be safe to send these fellows to the front, but they don’t seem to fancy ’em somehow. I’m not sure but they’re right; still when it comes to looting I’d back our fellows against any corps—ah! or any brigade in the army.”

“Well, you see,” said Arkwright, “their proficiency in that respect alone is sufficient to condemn them to inaction. There happens just now to be no scope for their peculiar talents at the front. They could

only loot our side, and, upon my soul, we've so deuced little to lose we couldn't stand any petty abstraction, to say nothing of its not being worth their while. But here, Cis, if you mean business, take my advice and chuck that corps. This thing mind's got to be fought out in the Crimea at present, and those fellows will never be sent there. Erzroum, Kars, or up that way, will be their destination, if ever they are sent to the front in any direction. The Crimea, my boy, is the cockpit in which the first main between the Muscovite and the Western Powers is to be decided. We're bound to go on there till we've got Sebastopol. About what is to follow then this prophet's dumb. It's not necessary to speculate on at present. We are very much outside at present, and shall be quite content to just hold our own till the spring."

"But surely we've reinforcements on the way out?" exclaimed Cis.

"A dubious blessing," rejoined Arkwright,

diving into a mysterious *salmi*. We can't quite feed those we have there, and a multiplication of mouths means an extension of that difficulty."

"But we must have more men," cried Cis.

"Get me another pint of stout, waiter. Of course we must, but we hardly want them till the spring. John Bull is just waking up to the muddle we're in. Grub and transport is a mere matter of money now, and England, when it comes to that, is bad to beat; two, three, or four thousand navvies would soon make a road to the front, and there's no fear of our having plenty of everything unless its men next year. We must win in the end. It's water carriage against land unmitigated by railroad. The Russians have the best of it now, but they won't have six months hence; but there'll be a power of stiff fighting before we get Sebastopol. The Muscovite has shown already that he yields never a

yard without a good stand-up tussel, and is always good to try till daylight to recover anything he lost at sunset. ‘The Ovens,’ in the taking of which poor Tryon of the Rifles lost his life, gave them a rare lively night in the left attack. They were seized with a cheer and a rush with the bayonet; but the Russians came on again and again till sunrise to dispute possession.”

“Yes, it was a fine thing that,” said Cis gloomily, “and to think of kicking about here in all this tawdry”—and here he glanced contemptuously at his lace-dizened uniform—“while such chances as that are going on at the front!”

“Well, poor Tryon’s chance came off the wrong way, like many another good fellow’s since we landed at Old Fort; but we can’t all win whatever the game is, and there will be more deuce aces thrown than double sixes no doubt by those gambling with death around Sebastopol. Nevertheless, Cis, I say, resign your commission in ‘the

Pillagers,' sink that gilded splendour, and come back with me in three weeks. There's plenty of work for all of us, and a volunteer of the right sort, like yourself, won't find himself out of employment long, I'll warrant. If you don't mind taking a subaltern's berth there are regiments at the front woefully short of officers."

"I'd take a non-commissioned officer's appointment sooner than knock about here in this peacocky garb," rejoined Cis curtly.

"Well, old man, if that's your temper you needn't be downhearted; never fear but what you'll find a place amongst the commissioned after a week or two. Now, let's go and smoke."

The two adjourned to that ante-room off the *Salle-a-manger*, which was dedicated to the Nicotian goddess; literally, at that time, the high change of travel and the hot-bed of *canards*. It was more thinly occupied than usual, and conversation languished, like the operations of the Allies. There was

little indeed of a cheerful nature to be got out of Crimean talk at that time. The sufferings of those engaged in the Sebastopol leaguer were no secret at Constantinople, and the long aisles of the big hospital on the opposite side gave appalling corroboration of the truth of these stories. It was well for the besiegers that the besieged were as exhausted as themselves, and left the annihilation of their foes to those grim Generals, January, February, and March. It was an anxious time; raise the siege the Allies could not even if they wished. To disembark was an impossibility. No; they were in “the ring” now, and the battle between them and the Muscovite had to be fought out then and there. Grant’s famous struggle in the wilderness during the great American rebellion bore the nearest resemblance to the Crimea of all later warfare—a slogging, dogged fight, with very little strategy in it.

And it was about this time, while they

were still waiting for Arkwright to recover his health and strength so as to be once more able to face the trying and dreary trench work of those gloomy winter months, that the news came down to Constantinople of that awful hurricane in which the 'Black Prince,' one of the few ships laden with warm clothing, of which the authorities actually had knowledge, foundered, and went down with every sock and blanket,—to say nothing of her crew. I am not going to dip any further into that miserable muddle ; there was plenty enough said deservedly, both at the time and afterwards—albeit that the army, like the serpent, moves upon its belly, has never been, nor is yet, an admitted fact amongst our military administrators. The necessities of life, by the way, seemed as scarce amongst the pursuers of the light-footed Egyptians as they were with their forbears who fought so hardly for the possession of the famous fortress of the Chersonèse. Singular, we

place the last hero of Egypt on the pedestal of public opinion, just as we take the hero of the Peninsula down from his pedestal of stone. Can satire go further?

A world of gammon and spinach, my masters, in which it is only the new lamps that sell. An age of cant and humbug, in which it is only the new *culte* that goes down. Æstheticism has pretty well had its day. Shall we resort to gladiatorial exhibitions and the fierce sports of the arena? A man at bay for his life has much attraction in the law courts, and to see one of these miserables wrestle against condemnation will cause much influx of silk and satin to our modern arenas, and endless applications to the Judge who has the disposal of seats. The barbarian battling out his life with the wild beast, or the murderer contesting his existence with the hangman; is there much after all in this advanced civilization we are so apt to brag about? Very little, I trow.

But to moralize is to bore. Reflections on the past are of no more account than regrets over the spilt milk, while speculations on the future usually expose the prophet to ridicule. Let us still continue to sing 'Cock-a-doodle-do' to the amusement of continental nations, and be duly thankful that ten thousand Osmanli of the sort that confronted the Russe at Plevna were not behind the lines at Tel-el-Kebir instead of the "light-footed" fellahs of the land of the Pharaohs.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD COMRADES.

BUFFETING her way slowly through the waters of the Euxine, hardly yet apparently settled down after the savage tempest of St. Andrew's Day, was a small passenger steamer, threading her course to that rugged promontory, which, crowned by that Genoese fort on its summit, was once more destined to become famous in the history of Europe. Since the days when Xenophon and his Greeks escaped from Central Asia to take refuge on the waters of the Black Sea, the Chersonese had pretty well faded out of the minds of Western Europe. Through the long struggle of the nations against Napoleon the Crimea had never been hinted

at as a battle-ground, but now all who cared to read knew that a bitter quarrel, nominally between the Osmanli and the Muscovite, albeit in reality the stern protest of France and England against the Russian eagles entering Constantinople, was there to be determined.

Standing on the bridge of the steamer and peering through the scud and haze, somewhat characteristic of Black Sea weather in December, are Cis Calvert and his Fusilier friend, Jerry Arkwright.

“There you are,” exclaimed the latter; “one can make it out distinctly now. There’s the old fort, and another two hours will see us in Balaklava. Ha! and there’s the old music.”

And as he spoke, a low, sullen boom was wafted across the seething waters, which even Cis Calvert, whose ears were not attuned to the melody, recognized as a growling defiance from the leaguered fortress.

“I suppose,” said Cis, “that sound is incessant?”

“Well,” replied Arkwright, “as you know, I’ve been out of it since the Inkerman business, but I don’t think that there’s much firing done upon either side for the present. We of course exchange a shot or two at intervals just to show the fight is not over, and we mean to be at them again before long; but you know, as far as we are concerned, getting ammunition up to the front is a very serious difficulty, and when once got there, we can’t afford to throw it lightly away. As for our friends inside they are simply defending their own arsenal, and probably have both unlimited guns and ammunition, judging from what I saw before I left and the awful reports that have come down from the front of late. I fancy just at present they are leaving the wet and cold of the winter to settle us. They may fairly argue, ‘You can’t get in, and half of you won’t be about when the spring comes.’”

Cis gazed with rapt attention at the grim, rugged cliffs as the steamer rapidly closed upon her landfall. This, then, was the scene of the famous duel, to join in which he had made every sacrifice, and yet did he but know it, even at this very moment bitter tongues were busy at his expense up in the Yorkshire wolds, as well as in the sandy plains of the Deccan, marvelling how any soldier could have resigned his profession when his country was engaged in the biggest war she had waged since Napoleon's final downfall at Waterloo. It was "hard lines," but the fates were against Cis. He was innocent, but yet he persistently appeared in the blackest colours to his friends and acquaintances; and moreover, his hot temper had prompted him to scant patience when he found men ready to believe things to his detriment. Instead of following Annie Aysgarth's advice and living such scandal down, he had invariably fled from it; and though the mere fact that

he had volunteered for the Crimea, albeit he had sold out in India, was quite sufficient to clear his reputation in that respect, still neither in York nor the Deccan was this latter circumstance known. So far it had never occurred to him what comment might be made upon his abrupt retirement from the Royal Dunbars ; but this he did know, that twice he had hurriedly left a regiment on account of a great scandal. Was he to clear all stain from his name before Sebastopol ? Was the chance to be vouchsafed to him ? Would he get employment of any kind ? Surely, as Arkwright said, there must be room and work for all who could grasp a sabre. Still as they glided through the narrow entrance of the land-locked harbour of Balaklava, Cis could but reflect sadly that he should shortly be shaking hands with all his old comrades of the —th Lancers and yet not be of them ; talking to men whom he had known since he first donned sword and spur, men who had

driven their horses through the death-ride of the "Six Hundred," and that he was not with them.

Calvert gazed with amazement as the steamer crept into the berth allotted to her, in that unfortunately little understood chaos which Balaclava at that time presented. Ships were packed close as herrings in a cask, close as the yachts in the Granville Basin at Dover previous to the race week. Boats shot about in every direction through the gloom, bearing the British officer, clothed at that time principally in hair and griminess, ravenous for food or liquor, or anything that might mitigate the monotony of salt pork and rum. It was not of course so much that the things were not there, although that was, perhaps, a subject not to speak too confidently about, but that nobody knew in which ship to search for cargoes. What might be termed quite the superfluities of life lay close along the walls; boots, warm clothing, and the

essentials layed far out, with no record of their valuable freight to guide those on shore only too anxious to come by such things.

The two men were not long in making their way on shore, and Arkwright speedily ran across a young gentleman of his own corps, who was down foraging, and who promised to bring ponies to convey him, Arkwright, and his baggage to the front next day. Striding through the mud, for to pick your way in Balaclava would have been quite a work of supererogation, Arkwright led the way to Oppenheim's store—a philanthropist, who sold well at a price pretty well everything that reached the shores of the Crimea. You paid well—why not? Men had little to think about but the keeping of soul and body together in those days. The great ganglionic centre becomes the god of our idolatry in such times, and I'm afraid the possessor of a couple of ducks would have been deemed

more desirable as a host than the greatest humourist in the Crimean army. Half a score of hands were stretched forth to welcome Jerry Arkwright, a popular man, and one who had been out from the beginning till knocked over on that misty Inkerman morning. Jerry, as may be supposed, had a very large and numerous acquaintance; but with Cis it was different. The ex-Lancer had by no means the catholic acquaintance of the Fusilier. Big camps did not exist in the pre-Crimean days, and excepting in such places as Dublin, or it may be Limerick, the cavalry by no means saw so much of their infantry brethren as they have done since; but a big war, and more especially when an army is destined to be concentrated, as was the case with the English in the Chersonese, of necessity draws them closer together.

Suddenly a slight boyish figure, the gold band of whose forage-cap bore tokens of the wild, wet weather the allies had recently

experienced, pushed his way through the throng. His uniform was not only frayed, but bore, sad to say of a light dragoon, unmistakable signs of patching and darning. Though healthy, his face bore a somewhat worn, haggard appearance, characteristic of those who had gone through the discipline of those first three months' Crimean campaigning.

"Cis Calvert, by all that's unfathomable! Cis Calvert, by all that's glorious! Good Heavens! old man, do let me shake hands with you, if it is only to feel certain that it is yourself and not your wraith that I am speaking to. Good Lord! Cis," continued young Harperley, as he wrung his old captain's hand, "why we all looked upon you as in India, miles away, but of course now you're coming back to take a turn with the old corps?"

"I only wish, Harry, that it may be so," replied Calvert sadly, "but you must know I am no longer a soldier. It's too long a story

to tell now, but I came to worse grief in India than I did at York. I left the Royal Dunbars in a fit of anger. I was just as wrongly accused of having a hand in a racing robbery there as I was after that miserable ride over the Crockley Hill Course this time two years. In the first case, dear old Copplestone and my brother officers stood to me like men. Whatever any of you might think about my quarrel with Crymes, you all absolved me from any knowledge of the Mumper's previous name and history. In the Royal Dunbars it was otherwise; they neither liked me nor I them. They at once took part against me, and a sharp ten minutes' interview with the imbecile who commanded them resulted in an exchange of shots on both sides that left so little chance of cordiality again between us as to make my leaving the regiment in some shape almost a necessity. I was mad to be with you all out here. It was misery to think that my luck had thrown me out of the

dear old corps just before they were destined to see service ; and when, Harry, I read the glorious but terrible story of that day in the valley of Balaclava the tears rained from my eyes, not only for those whose hands I should never clasp more, but also to think that I had not been riding, stirrup to stirrup, with all my dear old pals of the last ten years in that supreme hour of grief and gallantry."

"Well, it was roughish, you know," rejoined the cornet, whose amazement at his late captain's somewhat high-flown language was visible in his face. He could not understand it. Men engaged in the real game of war indulge very little in these sort of flights; their talk is essentially curt and prosaic, that is to say amongst our own people, who are wont to feel ashamed of the Victoria Cross when they have won it, and deprecate nothing so much as an explanation of how they obtained it. "We rode straight, Cis, and we rode fast, though, upon my soul, we

can't take much credit for the latter. We had to save those guns if we could, and considering what a cross fire it was, a man would have been pretty tired of life who didn't bustle through it; and when more than half of us were down, and the remainder of us all broken, the man who had a horse under him and didn't hurry back must simply have lost all his ideas."

"You had a terrible 'return' after the fight," replied Cis, "but yet not quite so bad as was the fate of some of the other regiments in the Brigade. Poor Strangford, I saw, was killed."

"Yes," replied the cornet gravely, as his voice sunk. "He was riding not six lengths from me, and threw up his arms with a shriek that I seem to hear even now and again in the night-time, before he pitched from his saddle. We brought him in next day and buried him; but the doctor said he'd been shot clean through the heart, and was probably dead ere he touched the

ground. Radcliffe too was awfully knocked about—had indeed to be sent away—and has not as yet come back to us ; while your old opponent, the Major, rode as he did that day when he led the field from Askham Bog across the Rufford Drain to Red House. By heavens ! Cis, he did terrible work during that ride. Stern, hard, and relentless we all knew him. His sabre was red to the hilt when he saw our lines again, and there must have been many a wail of woe from beyond the steppes when the record of the Major's savage handwriting was published."

"Did he come through scatheless himself ?" asked Cis.

"No, indeed. He had three or four sword-wounds, while his clothes were torn to ribbons, and they at first talked of sending him also down to Scutari, but he said grimly that nothing ever hurt him, and he would be d—d if he went except in a coffin. You can't think what a changed man he is since out here. Few of us liked

him in the old days—few of us indeed knew him. I assure you that he's now not only quite popular, but is looked forward to amongst the cavalry as one of the rising men. But of course you're coming out to see us all, and I suppose you'll hang on to us at all events till something suitable turns up?"

"You forget, Harry," replied Calvert, "that I am no longer a soldier. Until I have got a berth of some sort I am simply a useless incumbrance, a consumer of rations which I can do nothing to earn, and from all accounts rations are by no means too plentiful."

"That they ain't," replied Harry with a grin. "We don't lose our temper because there's no fish, nor turn up our noses at anything as long as it's fresh in this country, old man. You can either eat anything, or nothing; and in the latter case the sooner you clear out the better. But, Cis, you're not going to let that old Mumper story

prevent your taking a turn with us. The whole truth came out before we left York, and we all know now, including Crymes, that you were the victim of a most craftily-concocted plant. That old black horse had been bought to perpetrate precisely the fraud which he eventually did in your name. The planners of this precious robbery lost the Mumper owing to a compulsory sale by the sheriff, but to their great satisfaction suddenly discovered that you meant to race him, and were consequently going to play their game for them. The manipulation of the betting market was of course easy, and nothing could be safer than to bet against a horse which they knew they could disqualify should he chance to win. To back the Cid and bet against the Mumper were obviously their tactics. They looked upon the race, as we all did, as lying between the pair. Had the Cid won they would have said nothing, but of course when the Mumper came in first they

objected. Old Charrington found the whole thing out two or three months after you left, got hold of the name of the chief actor in the rascally business, and then communicated it all to Crymes. The Major's turf lore stood you in good stead there, Cis. He recognized the man at once, and said, though it was a big thing to say, he didn't believe there was a greater scoundrel unhung. He had gone under a score of aliases, and that he had evaded so far the clutches of the law only showed what a cunning knave he was."

"Well, thank heavens, my name stands thoroughly clear in the eyes of all of you, and I presume I may add in the eyes of the Yorkshire people too?"

"Bless your soul, yes. Old Charrington wasn't the man not to send the story around; besides, Cis, you know you had plenty of good friends, and my father amongst them, who were only too glad when they could refute the scandal against you."

“Yes,” rejoined Calvert, gravely; “I am glad that your father should know that I was blameless in the matter. And Annie, what of her?”

“Why, you know she never held you guilty any more than I ever did. Nothing could have made either of us ever credit a thing like that of you.”

Bitterly did Cis now think of the complication that had happened to him in the Deccan. Almost at the same time that Fortune was working for him, and, with the assistance of his friends, clearing his name in Yorkshire, his malignant star had plunged him into a still more serious scrape in India. Cis Calvert does not know it as yet, but in the Madras Presidency that Mrs. Daventry has left her husband is well known, and it is generally believed in company with Captain Calvert.

“I have heard nothing of her or any of you for so long that I felt almost afraid to ask.”

“Why, good heavens! surely you and Annie correspond still. She said nothing to me about you just at last, but of course it is now months since I left home; still I always supposed that she heard regularly from you.”

“No; I suppose it is my fault. I can only say that I did what I thought was right. A man lying under such a stigma as I did was not justified in holding a girl to her troth.”

“Pooh!” rejoined Harry Harperley contemptuously, “that is all cleared away now; besides, my sister is a girl in ten thousand, grit to the tips of her fingers, and I fancy you might have depended upon her sticking to you if all that was hinted against you had been really true.”

All that story about Cis Calvert’s flirtation with Mrs. Daventry only reached Byculla Grange just before the —th Lancers got their route for the East. That it should reach Miss Aysgarth’s ear promptly was but

natural. There are always women who never spare a sister in her agony. But people generally are not given to hint that a man's sister has been jilted before his face, so that in the very few days that elapsed before the regiment left, it is no great matter for astonishment that that Deccan story should never have reached young Harperley's ears. That a proud girl like Annie Aysgarth would mention such a thing in her letters to her brother was little likely. She, who would have stood by him to the last, had reluctantly come to the conclusion that he loved her no longer. Had he done so he would never have failed to answer her letters. Infatuated by that Indian woman, he had doubtless forgotten all about her. All must be over henceforth between them. After that last letter she could stoop to no further overtures; and yet there were times when Annie Aysgarth, in the loyalty of her love, wondered whether that story she had heard at Byculla was really true,

or the result of Mrs. Charrington's "embroidery." Anyway, it was months now since she had heard anything of Cis, and not only did she marvel much when she should be destined to hear of him again, but dreaded it too not a little.

"Well, you see, it's a good bit since I left India, and then I've been kicking about wasting my time with those Bashi-Bazouks. I thought they were safe to put those beggars in the front, on the same principle that our gallant allies yield the *pas* with their Zouaves to *les enfants perdus*."

"Ah, old man, I don't think our people think as highly of Beatson's fellows as the French do of their Zouaves. They've real rum 'uns in their ranks, of all nations, according to rumour; but there's no doubt they're real gluttons when it comes to fighting, and they ask for nothing better than to be put in the thick of it. But look here, old man, you must come out and shake hands with what's left of the old lot. I

shall come in to-morrow with a spare pony. We'll meet you here at twelve and take you out to lunch. You needn't come out 'a watering for the flesh-pots.' *Entrées* are what you call scarce with the bipeds, and as for the horses, poor brutes, they literally are, in the old showman's vernacular, a gnawing of their tails for very hunger. And now, good-bye. I've just collared a couple of bottles of Oppenheim's particular. He's right not to give it a more definite name, because further than being d—d strong, I should hesitate to put a name to it."

Cis and his friend Arkwright speedily made their way back to their ship. Afternoon closes in early in December, and the majority of people in Balaclava had to make their way up to the front; and it was very easy in those days to lose your way after sundown, and spend hours wandering about strange camps before finding your own. All their fellow-passengers had landed and dispersed, and the Fusilier and Cis passed a

very dull evening, broken only by the low jabbering of strange tongues in the adjacent vessels, for Babel was not more prolific in languages than Balaclava at that time, and the low, sullen boom from the besieged fortress, which told that the Bastion de Mât, or Redan, still hurled defiance at the foe.

“Well, Jerry,” said Calvert, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, “it’s pretty dull work here, even with you to talk to. You’re all right, will be amongst your own people to-morrow, and no call to complain of idleness, I’d dare swear; but to live down here on board ship will just send me wild. If I can’t get employment in a few days I don’t know what I shall do.”

“Don’t be a fool, Cis. Deuce a fear but what the chance of being shot will be speedily provided you, but your highness can’t come bustling up here and expect to find a general’s commission waiting for you on the beach. Now, look here. Our chief’s

a regular brick, and I, in consequence of my manifold virtues, naturally an eminent favourite with him. I know, sad to say, that the dear old corps is terribly short of officers, and when I've told him your story I feel pretty sure he will apply for you as a volunteer. He stands well with the authorities, and they are not likely to refuse his request, and if you are not in the way of your full share of kicks for the minimum of half-pence, by the Lord I can only say they've just awoke to the value of the Fusiliers. There's been no disposition to keep us in lavender so far. I'll see about it as soon as ever I get up there, and if the chief only says yes, shall come down and fetch you up bodily the day after to-morrow. You can live with me, you know, and come down and take a turn or two in the trenches as an amateur until an appointment of some sort is made out for you. And now it's time to turn in, so good night."

"Thanks no end, old man. By Jove, if

you can only manage that I'll ask no more. Give me but that start, and I know the rest is in my own hands," and the hand-grip Cis exchanged with his chum was of that sort that serves the Anglo-Saxon so much better than words in his emotional moments.

The next morning Arkwright took his departure, and at noon young Harperley duly kept his tryst at Oppenheim's with Calvert, and the pair rode leisurely away to the lines of the Light Brigade, behind Kadakoi. The cornet had already acquainted his brother officers with Cis's presence in the Crimea and his reason for it, consequently there was quite a crowd to welcome him in what was not the mess tent, for in that gloomy winter no regiment indulged in such a luxury, but a sort of lounging tent, where the —th Lancers met to gossip, smoke, and drink their ration rum, or whatever other potable they might come by. Foremost to welcome him was stalwart old Copplestone.

"Ah, Calvert, my boy," exclaimed the

Colonel, "if I'd only guessed the work before us, I'd never have let you leave us; not that I've any complaint to make against your substitute, but I'm fond of the whelps of my own rearing."

And then the others crowded round him, shook him heartily by the hand, whilst they murmured their regrets that he was no longer amongst them. And then the talk fell into that grave, earnest mood to which it at times gravitates in such scenes, when men have to recall for the benefit of some new-comer how So-and-so made an end of it. Cis had to listen once more to the story of poor Strangford's death, and that of half a score more in his own or other dragoon regiments with whom he had lived on terms of the closest intimacy. There is an ever-growing callousness in all campaigning, but still men speak sadly, and with bated breath, of their comrades who perished in the strife. It was at this juncture Crymes entered the tent. For a moment Cis looked embarrassed.

He could not but remember that day when he had to humble himself before the Major, and apologize for his too reckless tongue; but Crymes grasped the situation with his accustomed *sangfroid*, and extending his hand said,—

“Will you shake hands with me, Calvert? It is my turn to apologize now, for I plead guilty to having wronged you, though only in thought, I went no further. The whole miserable business, as I am aware Harperley has told you, was all cleared up very shortly after you left. There is plenty of scope for quarrelling out here without quarrelling with one another. Ah!” he continued, with a faint smile, as Cis cordially responded to his overture of amity, “we wanted you and hundreds more of you the day they sent us up the valley yonder,” and here the Major jerked his head in the direction of the valley of Balaclava. “It was as lively while it lasted as anything we ever had with the York and Ainsty, and the worst of it is it

was all a blunder. It's little use wrangling about whose, but there was a sore loss of light dragoons, without any corresponding result that day; in fact, except myself, I don't know any one who got much satisfaction out of it."

"You, Major," exclaimed young Harperley; "why, except that clip on your head, and I don't know how many more disagreeable prods about you generally, I can't for the life of me see what you got out of it."

"Listen, young 'un," replied Crymes, as a slightly ironical smile played over his face: "I'm a horrible pagan, I'm afraid, and, sad to say, my gladiatorial instincts have led me ever since I became a dragoon to wish for my wicked will with my sabre for half-an-hour. Well, they let us loose that day, though I only wish it had been with more purpose."

"It's bad for the other side," muttered young Harperley, "when the Major gets

his wicked will with his sabre, that's all I can say."

"And now, Calvert," continued Crymes, "what are you going to do? I'm sure the Colonel, like all the rest of us, will be glad if you elect to take a turn once more with us."

"You're all very good," rejoined Cis, "but the fact is I came up with Jerry Arkwright of the —th Fusiliers, and he has promised to get me attached to them if possible. You see they're at the front," continued Cis, half apologetically.

"And we're not," broke in Crymes, sharply. "You're quite right, Calvert; there's not likely to be anything for us to do, unless it's bury our horses, until the place is taken, and if I know anything about it that won't be for some months yet. No, the infantry fellows are likely to gather all the laurels that are going for the present. You'll see fighting with the Fusiliers deuce a fear before long. I half envy you your chance,

as I'm sure it offers the best opportunity of seeing service."

A little more desultory conversation with his brother officers, and then Cis made his way back to Balaclava on foot, there to wait on board ship till he heard what Jerry Arkwright had managed to do for him.

CHAPTER V.

THE REAL THING AT LAST.

CIS CALVERT was not destined to remain long in suspense, for the next day brought not a note, but Jerry Arkwright himself.

“It’s all right, old man,” he exclaimed, the minute he gained the deck. “I’ve brought down the ponies ; pack up your traps, and as soon as I have collared a ham we’ll make the best of our way to the front. The chief’s a trump, as he always is. ‘Captain Calvert !’ he exclaimed ; ‘yes, I know him by name. Not a bad sort, considering he’s only a cavalry man so I’ve heard ; with rather less side and a trifle less wax in his moustache than those fellows

generally affect. However, the beggars rode straight the other day there's no denying, and I should think, like the rest of us, are more concerned about filling their mouths than twisting their moustaches. We are awfully short-handed in officers, and a fellow who's come all the way from India to take his share in the fighting don't deserve to be disappointed. I'll apply for him at once. Go down to Balaclava and tell him so yourself, and that he'd better come up here at once and employ himself in learning his way about the ditches, till I receive an acting commission for him from headquarters.' So now, old man, as soon as ever you get your traps collected meet me at Oppenheim's. I shall have got the ham by that time I hope, for my two subalterns will be both savage and grumpy if I don't come back with that at my saddle-bow."

A dull, black, dreary time was this in which Cis Calvert was about to commence his campaigning experiences. The Cher-

sonese, or at all events that corner occupied by the allies, was a sea of mud, and for the half-starved animals, insufficient as they were in number, to carry the food absolutely necessary to the front was an impossibility. That regiments should sometimes be a day without rations was a contingency scarce possible to provide against. That they should have now and again, in rough military metaphor, "to eat their cartridges," is an experience common to all campaigns; but that the commissariat, which during forty years of peace had faded away into almost the shade of a service, when suddenly called upon to resuscitate itself and perform the most arduous duties, should fail, was surely only what might have been expected. Whether it is in a more satisfactory state at the present is, I fancy, open to question, and the glories of Egypt somewhat testify to their shortcomings in that respect.

The capture of that ham apparently

proved more difficult than Jerry had anticipated, or else his active mind had aspired to the attainment of further luxuries, for it was not till considerably past the hour of tryst that Arkwright made his appearance.

“Here, out with the ponies, quick, Mike,” exclaimed the Fusilier. “There’s a fellow just told me there’s a beastly Black Sea fog rolling down over the monastery, and, by Jove, if we’re caught in that we shall be bothered to pick our way home. The roads, my boy, are very imperfectly defined in these parts, and you’re off them and into a kitchen, hut, or stable before you know where you are. There’s a monotony too about our architecture that’s puzzling. The over-grown umbrella under which I live is exactly like your or any one else’s umbrella; and we’ve no time to go into high art in the shape of fancy paintings with which to distinguish them one from another. But here comes Mike with the ponies. If you think, just because it’s only seven or

eight miles, we can canter it in forty minutes you'll be speedily undeceived. There, that's your mount. Don't turn your nose up because he's only thirteen two and you can see his ribs. We call them in pretty good condition out here when you can't see clean through 'em. Now that animal," continued Jerry with a wink, as he swung himself into his saddle, "could about do his seven miles in an hour and a half on Newmarket Heath, but I fancy he'll be nearer three than two carrying you up to camp."

There was a very great deal more earnest than jest in Jerry Arkwright's chaff. The poor half-starved "garrons" that were at that time slaves of the regimental officers or the commissariat, could go little faster than at a foot's pace through the sea of mud it was their daily lot to travel. Nothing but the rare strain of Barb blood in their veins pulled through the survivors; and about the poor brutes that perished over that weary seven miles the spring, when it

came drying up the mud and bringing forth the primroses, made terrible revelations; grimmer revelations yet came to light too with the violets over the scrub-clothed slopes of Inkerman and the blood-stained turf in Balaclava valley; for there was exposed many a poor fragment of wrecked humanity, sacrifices to the grim Moloch of war, who had perished uncoffined, unannealed.

Jerry's prophetic friend unfortunately proved to have forecasted the weather only too accurately. Before they had got a couple of miles out of Balaclava the white, misty Black Sea fog began to envelope them. As long as they kept the main causeway this was of little consequence. The poor ponies no doubt were over their fetlocks in mud; the road was full of holes, which would probably have settled the springs of the strongest built provincial carriage that ever ran in England in about a quarter of an hour; but still it was a road, and was useful insomuch as it kept them in their straight

path to the front. But shortly after leaving Kadakoi came the place beyond which the road had not been carried, and where the trails—I can use no other word for them—diverged in different directions across the plateau to the various divisional camps. And now their difficulties began. To follow these trails with plenty of light, when one could take note of the surrounding landmarks, was of course not difficult, but when verging on sundown, and enveloped in a Black Sea fog, which, though never attaining the density of that sulphurous, unimpenetrable vapour that in winter time enshrouds our own metropolis, it became embarrassing even to men who, like Arkwright and his henchman, were conversant with every yard of the ground.

“We are off the line, Mike,” suddenly exclaimed Arkwright, as he pulled up his pony. “Where the deuce we have got to I’m blessed if I know. We surely ought to have passed in rear of the left attack siege

train before this, but we not only don't see that but not a sign of tents of any kind. A horrible suspicion has come over me that we've wandered up the wrong side of the ravine. Just where it begins, you know, it's a mere gentle dip there, and very easy to make a mistake about. If so the first thing we shall strike will be the French lines. What do you think, Mike?"

"Well, yer honour, it's just my opinion we've lost our way."

"As if there was any doubt about that, you idiot," rejoined Jerry, laughing; "but where do you think we are?"

"Upon my sowl I don't know; but shure av we continue our wanderings we'll hit lines of some sort—our own, the French, or it may be the t'other peoples'. Annyhow it's a mighty mane night to lie out in the open. The bhoys 'll have a bad time to-night of it in the trenches."

"Well," said Arkwright a little petulantly,

“there’s not much chance of getting a hint what’s to be done out of you.”

“’Deed, Captain, I know my place bettther. Is it for the likes of me to presume to be thinking what’s best to be done when yer honour’s to the fore?”

“Well, there is something in his philosophy after all,” said Arkwright. “It’s an ugly night to lie out, and we must come across lines of some sort at last, and they’ll give us shelter if they can’t give us supper.”

Once more the trio proceeded to blunder along through the mist, and after another fifteen minutes’ riding Arkwright suddenly exclaimed :—

“Come, we’re close upon tents of some kind.”

The words were scarcely out of his lips when the sharp rattle of a firelock as it came down to the charge, was followed by the “Qui Vive?”

“Ami, officier Anglais,” rejoined Arkwright hurriedly. “French, by Jove, Cis,”

he continued, "and there's no time to be lost answering these fellows, they let go upon monstrous slight provocation."

The result of this exchange of civilities was a polyglot and somewhat incomprehensible conversation, in which French, English, and Mike's Milesian brogue alternately mingled. At last the sentry passed the word for his officer, who it so happened had a slight smattering of English, and between his smattering and Arkwright's similar smattering of French, they at last ascertained that they had wandered into the lines of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, having, as Jerry had shrewdly conjectured, diverged to the left of the ravine instead of to the right, which they ought to have done shortly after passing Kadakoi; but that this was the camp of the Chasseurs d'Afrique to an old hand like Arkwright was explanation of where they were. Thanking the French officer he bade him a courteous good night; and then turning to Calvert exclaimed,—

“It’s deuced awkward, Cis, but we’ve got all away to our left, and shall have to cross the ravine close by the Naval Brigade camp. Hitting off the road there will be uncommon awkward in this sort of light, and it’s rather a queer place to get the ponies down if we miss it. Once pass that and it is pretty plain sailing. I shall know my way then.”

But the hitting off of the edge of the ravine proved by no means an easy matter, and again and again did Arkwright come to the conclusion that they had once more lost their way, and that they had by no means come the straightest path to where they were aiming for was more than probable.

“Here’s the ravine just to our right, glory be to God!” suddenly said Mike, “but it’s a mighty quare place we’ve hit it off at. It’ll be as well, Captain, to thry for the road before attempting to get down.”

But ride up and down the ravine in either direction much as they liked they could

discover no signs of a pathway leading to the bottom. The zigzag descent could only be designated as a mountain track, and was consequently not quite so easy to discover as a turnpike road. Now except here and there the descent was by no means precipitous—an awkward place to ride down no doubt, but with one of the surefooted Turkish ponies in broad daylight by no means a desperate undertaking. The difficulty at present consisted in picking your way. The party could see so very few yards ahead of them that they might be selecting one of the almost impracticable places.

“It’s awkward, Cis,” exclaimed Arkwright, “but we can’t spend the night looking for this confounded path. We must get off and lead down, and if destined to tumble down trust to not being broke in the process. I’ll give you a lead,” and so saying Jerry Arkwright swung himself off his pony and slipped the bridle through his arm.

“Mike, you scoundrel,” he added, “to break your own neck you’re quite at liberty, but remember you’re in charge of the commissariat, and the breaking of a bottle represents a general court-martial. Now, come on. The trenches, old man, are not half so dangerous as this.”

Their descent was slow, and could most decidedly not be deemed wanting in interest. There was either a man or a pony down every few yards, still they had achieved what Arkwright and Mike deemed about two-thirds of the descent, when suddenly Arkwright’s pony placed its foot upon something which gave way with him, pitched forwards on its head, and rolled heavily down the ravine.

“Hold hard,” cried Arkwright, as a hideous exhalation spread around them, “bear a little to the left; I know where we are now. We are right opposite the Naval Brigade, and have got amongst that mass of corruption which once were horses. Well

to your left, Cis," he shouted again. "We are really very few yards off the path, and though we have achieved that bit of knowledge too late to be of much good to us in getting down, it will be very useful to us in getting up the other side. I wonder how I shall find poor old Sambo when I get to the bottom. One comfort is, a Turkish pony takes a deal of killing."

On arriving at the bottom the wiry little steed was found shaking his head in a somewhat aggrieved fashion, and looking disconsolately round for his companions, and apparently very little the worse for his roll; barring a broken bridle there was really no great harm done, and to knot that was of course the work of only two or three minutes. The ascending path the opposite side was easily hit off, and after passing through the Naval Brigade camp, now that they had got their bearings the way to the second division was plain sailing.

"And now," said Arkwright, as they

handed their ponies over to the bătman, "come across and let me introduce you to the chief. He's as good a fellow as ever lived ; but if there's one thing would make him edgy it would be an addition to the ranks of the battalion without his knowledge. He's about right too. Short-handed as we are now, a colonel ought to know the whereabouts of even an available drummer."

Colonel Hamilton welcomed Cis with all that *camaraderie* which I verily believe is only known in the services, and perhaps never even then so thoroughly seen as when they are face to face with the "real thing."

"Known you by name, Captain Calvert, for some time. A man who having sold out volunteers to come here is worth having ; and at Arkwright's suggestion I had great pleasure in applying for an acting commission for you. I have no doubt I shall get it, and in the mean time I'm sure all my officers will have much pleasure in showing you the ropes, and of course if you

like to take a turn or two with us in the trenches pending your appointment you will familiarize yourself with what is rather an intricate country to a new-comer. However, you've had a long ride up from the front, and I've no doubt will be glad of something to eat as soon as you can get it. I can only say I shall be very pleased to have you with us, and leave you for the present to Arkwright's care."

A queer feeling was that first night at the front in that dismal winter in '54. It was the chances were so utterly different from what people pictured it. Imagination led one to conjure up in their mind's eye incessant salvoes of artillery, the continual whizzing of rockets, and an incessant spattering of musketry. But from the failure of the October bombardment to the spring-time, barring the episodes of Balaclava and Inkerman, both besieged and besiegers confined themselves to the sullen defiance of an occasional shot or two, that is, as far as the

artillery duel went. True the Russians ever and anon beat up the trenches of the allies in right reckless, resolute fashion, and when the crash of musketry was heard in the night-time all Crimean men knew there was a sharp and wicked bit of fighting going on somewhere along the line. There was a noted leader of these sorties well known by sight to the Second and Light Divisions, for the trenches at the right attack seemed to constitute this hero's happy hunting-ground, a tall, dark, daring fellow, clad in Albanian costume; he was a marked man both from his dress and gallantry. And when he eventually fell with his face to the foe in one of his dashing assaults there was a feeling of relief amongst those engaged in that attack, and a conviction that they were well rid of a most dangerous assailant. But the dull, depressing monotony of trench duty at that time was almost inconceivable. Sitting for hours in a cold wet ditch, waiting for

something which did not take place, is about the only simile one can give of it. No doubt every now and then, as I have just said, the Muscovite would make things lively enough for the most exigent fire-eater. Men might have no special gluttony for fighting, nor have any greater love for "villainous saltpetre" than Bob Acres, but there is a monotony connected with all big sieges which languish wont to make even those with very little stomach for fighting long for something that should break the dull daily routine.

The next night found the Fusiliers in order for the trenches, and as Arkwright said—

"There is no more fighting about it, Cis, than there will be in camp, and it's a little more damp and disagreeable; but I think, old man, it would be good policy to follow the chief's tip, and just have a look round the blessed ditches we're taking care of."

"Of course," replied Calvert, "a man

don't come out here as a volunteer unless he means work, and of course when anything does happen a man ignorant of the ground can be of comparatively little use."

"All right, then down you come with me to-night and study the ways and windings of the trenches."

A dull, grey evening. The sun had sunk to rest some two or three hours before the trench guards paraded on one of well-nigh the shortest days in the year. Clothed in their worn, grey, patched overcoats and common fur caps, there was a marvellous similarity about the British soldier of those times. All distinction of regiment seemed lost, and it really was by no means impossible for an officer strange to these haggard, half-starved bands to mistake the one for the other. And this was precisely what happened to Calvert, as with half a score more of what were called the covering parties, he threaded his way to that mystic ground pictured in England a scene of

romance, in reality the dull scene of prosaic suffering.

Scenery, romance, ay! scene of bitter misery to many thousands of miles off, if one can be allowed the expression. One, I recollect, who fell in that last grisly struggle which terminated in the triumph of the allies, and the general orders of the night contained unwittingly the ghastly mockery, "Captain ——, of the Connaught Rangers, has leave of absence to England from the eighth of September, 1855, pending his retirement from the service." His leave had come, but lying cold and stark in front of the great Redan, his lifeless face turned skywards, little wrecked he of leave or license at Her Majesty's hands. Dead; with his face to the foe, and cheering on the company he had long commanded, he had gone down like scores of others that bitter day. It was hard, after enduring all the chances of the campaign. He retired from the army at his mother's urgent request; he

“was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” For her sake he resigned his profession ; it was the very irony of fate that rendered it forty-eight hours too late.

But to return to Cis Calvert and the Fusiliers. As they wend their way to the trenches the different parties, as may be easily imagined, got a little entangled as they made their way to their different positions. To the old hands this was of course nothing, but to a neophyte like Cis Calvert it proved unexpectedly embarrassing. As before said, there was nothing to distinguish one regiment from another in their attire ; it was pretty dark, and even had it been light Cis of course could know none of his new comrades by sight. Getting somewhat uneasy at last, he suddenly addressed the man next to him, exclaiming,—

“You belong to the —th Fusiliers, my lad, don’t you ?”

“Nae, nae, sir. You joost gotten amaingst the Hielanders this time ; but if you’re

seeking your way into Sebastopol, if ye'll gang our gate ye'll get as near as is possible the noo I'm thinking."

For a few minutes Calvert's sensations were unpleasant in the extreme. He had lost his party, and after the terrible "hard lines" that seemed to dog his career, was horrified at what construction might be put on it. A man going under fire for the first time being suddenly discovered missing certainly runs the risk of being hardly judged by those associated with him. He had no fear of Arkwright conceiving an unfavourable opinion, but Cis had served too long not to know how terribly such a thing might be misconstrued by the men of the regiment. With the British soldier to have the faintest doubt of his officer being genuine "grit" is fatal. He can forgive incompetence, harsh treatment, or abuse, but the man who flinches himself he will never trust to.

Do you remember that famous Indian

story of that stern and rigid disciplinarian who commanded one of Her Majesty's regiments, and being perfectly aware of his own unpopularity thus addressed his soldiers. It was, I think, before the storming of the Sikh entrenchments at Sobraon.

"Men," he exclaimed, "you don't like me, I know, because I keep your necks pretty tight to the collar. I've even heard it hinted that I run a chance of being shot down by my own people the first time I lead them into action. I don't believe there's such a cur amongst you, but if there is, he's going to have his chance now, only mark me, by God, I recommend him not to do it this time. We're in a pretty tight place, and there's no one but me to get you out of it."

It flashed across Cis Calvert's mind at the present moment that not only were all these men new to him, but that he was coming into the regiment by what might be denominated a side door. He was not getting his

commission in the usual order of things, but receiving a mere acting lieutenancy pending official confirmation from home. He hadn't even got that as yet, and to be suspected of shirking on this his first night of soldiering with his new corps would, he knew, take a lot of living down. His anxiety was so obvious that the rugged old Highland serjeant whom he had addressed noticed it and remarked—

“Dinna be fashed, sir. Ye'll be new to the work I reckon, but we'll soon pass ye along to the Fusiliers the once we get doon.”

The grim old Scotchman spoke truth. Once they had gained the trenches Cis found very little difficulty in discovering Jerry Arkwright and his following.

A duller, drearier, more monotonous night than this promised to be perhaps the “covering parties” never looked out upon. Still it was all new to Cis, and it was with no little interest that, leaning his elbows upon the parapet of the advanced trench,

he peered through the murk at the dim outline of the great Redan and the long line of earthworks that connected it with the Malakoff Tower. Little to be seen—but he was gazing, it must be remembered, as men did who found themselves face to face for the first time with the famous fortress. It is an old world story now, but in those days people had been reading the thrilling stories of Inkerman and Balaclava, mixed with the half-pathetic, half-humorous stories of Crimean camp life for weeks and weeks, and curiosity concerning it ran very high.

Not a shot, not a sound, save ever and anon a dull, monotonous roar, that presaged the shower of grape that every fifteen minutes, as if regulated by a stop watch, the Russians sent up the Woronzoff road: terribly jealous ever was the Muscovite of that joint in his armour, albeit by no means a weak one. Still, quiet as the evening had begun, no old trench-goer would have

augured that it might finish in that wise. The storms of the trenches, like the white squalls of the Mediterranean, gave slight warning of their approach, and just as even the experienced mariner has occasionally bare time to close reef his topsails, so those who kept the trenches had scant time to spring to their feet and snatch at their arms before the foe was upon them.

“They look like leaving us to smoke our pipes in peace to-night,” said Arkwright, “but one can never be quite sure here, Cis. An ominous calm is of course often the presage of no end of a row down here,” and even as he spoke the Flagstaff Battery far away to the left broke out into angry violence, and the fierce angry flashes of its guns showed that the Russians and the French were differing violently in opinion. Another moment and the quick crack of musketry broke upon the ear, but the distance was too far for the cries of the combatants to reach their ears. “Hottish

work on the extreme French left," continued Arkwright, "though which side is making the sortie it is impossible to conjecture."

Suddenly from out of the darkness cracked the rifles of the advanced sentries, followed by a wild yell from the Russians as they chased those flying scouts pell-mell over the parapet.

"Stand to your arms," thundered Arkwright, and the hoarse cry echoed from end to end of the right attack. "The Albanian, by heavens!" exclaimed Arkwright, as through the mist dashed a tall, dark, handsome man, waving a sabre, habited in brodered fez and the snowy picturesque kilt of his countrymen.

Another moment and the grey-coated, flat-capped Russians were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with their English foes. There was little shouting now; fierce, smothered execrations and savage bayonet thrusts, mingling with the occasional crack of musket or revolver, alone marked such

stern contention as now went on in the advance parallel. That the bayonet is ever in use in large battles may perhaps be a question, but there can be no doubt about it in the storming of entrenchments. Through the whirlwind of the carnage the Albanian flashed like a meteor, and gallantly did the stubborn soldiers behind him respond to his lead. Wildly did Arkwright fight his way through the *melée* towards this gaily-habited chief, but the result of a furious blow dealt on the shoulder of an old Muscovite grenadier apparently did that grim warrior no harm, while Jerry's foot slipping in its delivery, he rolled over on his back in the mud. No matter to laugh at, absurd though it may sound, for shortening his firelock, the veteran would probably have closed Arkwright's account in this world with a bayonet thrust; but ere he could use it Calvert's revolver rang sharp and true, and the Russian fell face forward across his intended victim.

Cis had craved to see "the real thing," and was so far in luck. There was certainly no nonsense about his first experience in trench duty. The Russe had come on in earnest that night, with the fixed intention of scouring the trenches and spiking every gun in the third parallel; and if the fighting was destined to be short, as it usually was in these cases, there was no mistake about its being sharp while it lasted. The fierce, murderous instinct latent in all men, the savage lust of carnage, was now thoroughly aroused in Cis. Unheeding such wounds as fell to his share, he had now lost pretty well all feeling but the desire to kill, and it was in this mood that, amid the fierce imprecations which fell from the lips of his followers, the Fusiliers, he found himself with the blood streaming down his cheek face to face with the Albanian. War is not made with rose-water, and the twain struck at each other at once. Again the blood poured down Cis's face in response to a back-handed

stroke of his adversary's sabre. Reeling back he half mechanically parried another furious cut of the Albanian's, and with his left hand fired his revolver, which luckily had yet a chamber unemptied, and the Muscovite leader dropped in his tracks like a stricken deer. His followers seemed to lose all heart at his fall, and a few more minutes saw the Russians once more scrambling over the parapet in the direction of their own lines.

And then there was time to count up the cost, and see who would never again answer to their names at muster. One of the first to gain his feet was Jerry Arkwright, who, after a few muttered maledictions at the frivolous weapon supplied to their customers by army tailors, fell in his men, and proceeded to that grim sequel of battle—the calling of the roll. Some half-a-dozen killed and a score of men more or less wounded constituted the casualties of the Fusiliers, and then it

occurred to Arkwright what had become of Cis Calvert.

“Who knows anything about the gentleman who came down to us as a volunteer? What’s become of Mr. Calvert, does anyone know? He was talking to me when the attack began.”

“They’re a bringing him along now, sir,” replied a tough old corporal, who was busily engaged in staunching the blood which flowed from more than one reminiscence of the evening’s fight. “’Twas he shot down the white petticoated fellow that led them just before he fell himself. There was a pretty bit of hammer and tongs work between them before they both went down; but here they come, and the doctor with them.”

Anxiously Arkwright hurried forward to learn his friend’s fate, and it was with no little relief that he heard the surgeon’s cheery verdict of—

“All right; a bit knocked about, lost a

little more blood than's good for him, and hasn't quite come to himself as yet, but there's no real harm done. As for the white-kilted fellow who led our opponents, he'll trouble us no more. You've been away of late, Arkwright, and don't quite know what that means ; but that man," and he pointed down at the dark face of the Albanian, now set calm and immovable in death, "was a soldier every inch, and one of the most dashing leaders they had. There'll be quieter times for the right attack now he is gone, poor fellow."

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER FROM THE CRIMEA.

AT last England had realized the fact that after the long peace she was once more committed to a European war. The country hardly realized it at first. Dumb with the exultation of the dashing victory of the Alma, it was only those who had to make moan over their dead who thoroughly realized the cost of the game they were engaged in. But the triumph of the Alma was speedily followed by the fierce struggle of Inkerman, and though that might be called a victory, yet it was evident to all that such costly glories as these were little better than defeats. Through the house of the peer, as well as the cottage of the peasant, the story

of that terrible Sunday morning sent a wail of despair. The nation at last understood that a struggle with the Muscovite meant a good deal more than the clang of bells, cheers, fireworks, laurels, and salutes. And now slowly commenced to leak out the grim story of the misery and suffering of the army before Sebastopol; how that they were more besieged than besieging; how that they were perishing by hundreds, not from shot and shell, but from cold, wet, hunger, and exposure; from lack of clothing, from want of tents,—from want, in short, of the bare necessities of life.

Then England turned in her wrath, after the manner of the old Athenians, with the savage disposition to throw these shortcomings on some one, and to rend him there and then. But what would you have? Sift the thing as you might it was no one's fault in particular; it is simply the error that exists to this hour of believing that organization can be done at the last moment.

A country that declines the expense of maintaining a commissariat and transport staff in times of peace cannot be astonished at finding that they are not to be improvised at the last moment. Men are no more made organizers than they are poets or roasters, and that a scanty staff, to whom no practice has been vouchsafed, should display want of knowledge of their vocation should excite surprise in no one. But the nation did not understand this, and after the manner of a great constitutional country, hungrily demanded a victim. However, since the days when we shot an admiral, we have usually confined ourselves to clamouring for the culprit, a matter in which we have certainly shown more wisdom and discretion than our gallant allies of the Crimean days, who during the time of their own revolution not only demanded that some one should suffer for shortcomings, but took remarkably good care that a good many did.

That all this story of muddle and misery

should make a great impression in Yorkshire is needless to say. When the Charringtons, Mr. Harperley, Miss Aysgarth, and others, read the tale of Balaclava their hearts stood still, and they felt a strange sensation of choking in their throats. It was natural. Some four or five careless young fellows, who only a few months ago had been hunting, dancing, and laughing with them, were gone, and they should see them no more, and though Harry Harperley was as yet unscathed, yet every one saw now that there was many another life to be forfeited before the quarrel between Russia and the Western Powers was to be brought to a conclusion. Harry was a fair correspondent as things went, but writing letters on your knees with chilled fingers, in a soppy bell tent, is a performance that requires some fortitude. At the best of times the British subaltern is not a prolific correspondent. Observation tends to show that, except with reference to ways and means, he regards

letter-writing as a somewhat frivolous waste of time. They were certainly so far justified, insomuch as there was nothing satisfactory to tell. They were having "hard lines," and like the Anglo-Saxon generally were doggedly making the best of it. "This thing has got to be soldiered out, and of course we shall pull through in the end, but life at present ain't all 'beer and skittles,'" was pretty much the language in which most of these young philosophers would have summed up the situation. However, one February morning a letter, with the well-known Crimean post-mark, came, as a friend of mine used to describe it in those troublous times, "like a thirteen-inch shell." Miss Aysgarth pounced upon it at once, while her father looking across at her, said,

"Thank God, at all events our boy is all right. Tell me what he says as soon as you have made it out."

"Light Brigade Lines, Camp before Sebastopol.

" DEAREST ANNIE,

" You and the dear old father like to hear, and so like the exemplary son and brother that I am I write, although I have nothing to say. I remember in my school-boy days perusing, probably under compulsion, in the works of some great authority, that when a man had nothing to say he most distinctly had better not write, but if I wait for that, judging from appearances, you wouldn't hear from me for some time. We neither get on or go on; we don't even keep pegging away. As for us horse-soldiers we seem well out of it for the present, and indeed till they get some more of us out the picket work up the valley is about as much as we're fit for. We are not only terribly short of men, but if anything even worse off for horses. It's cold, and there's no doubt those poor fellows in the front must be having a pretty rough time of it; but although we are told that the Czar relies upon Generals January, February, and March, I can't help thinking we're through

the worst. A few weeks and we shall come to spring weather, and the springs here we are told are not of the bleak pattern that we are accustomed to on the Yorkshire wolds. Lots of reinforcements too are all ready to come along. The 10th Hussars and the 12th Lancers are on their way from India. Strong regiments both, and we are told that their Arabs will stand this work much better than our big horses. One thing is certain,—the Turkish ponies will pick up a living where an English thoroughbred would starve.

“Now I *have* a bit of news for you. Who do you think turned up here a few weeks back? No other than Cis Calvert! It seems he quarrelled with his Colonel in India, sold out of the Royal Dunbars all in a hurry, and then came out here as a volunteer; and for once, Annie, his luck really seems to have changed. He got attached to the —th Fusiliers, threw in for a rattling sortie his first night in the trenches, had the luck to shoot down the Russian leader, and, in fact, generally distinguished himself. He got knocked about

a bit, but there is no real harm done, and the Fusiliers are uncommon proud of their new recruit, dear old Cis, the very best of all our lot, and that's a big word. The Colonel said only the other day when he heard the trench story, 'We must have him back again as soon as he gets his company,' and promotion, Annie, runs pretty quick amongst us all now. Thanks to old Charington, we of course all know the true story of that luckless business on Crockley Hill. Crymes made up with Calvert the minute he saw him, saying he felt that he owed Cis an apology on his side, although in his ignorance he could hardly have acted differently from the way he did. I never felt half so jolly about anything in my life as when, having heard of his exploit, I rode up to the front and found he was not seriously broke. He will doubtless experience plenty of opportunities before we get inside.

"By the way, the Fusiliers had a good story going the day I was in their lines, of which Arkwright was the narrator. They had a court-martial it seems on a man for what

was supposed to be an attempt at desertion. The joke consists in the absurd wording of the charge. The man was arraigned 'for attempting to enter Sebastopol,' a thing we have been all trying to do for the last four months! Good-bye. Tell the father he'll have to rig me out all again in horse-flesh, as my sole surviving equine anatomy I really couldn't show on in the streets of York. Kindest remembrances to the Charingtons. Tell her she will have to give a series of dances 'when Harry comes marching home' to enable him to recover 'his steps;' and further inform the master of Byculla that I shall expect to be allowed five lives at pool for the first twelvemonth in consequence of the demoralizing effect this prolonged residence in uncivilized parts has produced in my billiard science. Once more, Annie dearest, good-bye. I—and all the rest—are very fit, always excepting those who you know from the papers have not been with us since that sad October day.

“Ever your affectionate brother,

“HARRY HARPERLEY.”

Miss Aysgarth could not refrain from a slight start as she read of Cis Calvert's presence in the Crimea. Her father marked her cheek flush and her eye sparkle as she perused the record of Cis's doings, and then he saw that unbidden tears were trembling in the lashes. It was with a slight mixture of sob and smile that she handed her letter across to the banker as she finished. The triumphant smile which always wreaths a woman's lips when she hears that the man she loves has distinguished himself, mixed as it must ever be in listening to such stories as the above, with a slight shiver at the dangers he has passed through. Cis Calvert in the Crimea? Where then, she thought, was this Indian siren, in whose toils he was immeshed? Was that rumour at Byculla Grange mere Anglo-Indian gossip? It might be, she thought. She was no child, nor ignorant that scandal was ever prevalent in the land. She had heard, moreover, that our Eastern empire is much addicted to

what they term "gup," whereby they mean gossip, scandal, or by whatever other equivalent the taking away of one's neighbours' characters may be designated. At all events there was one comfort. If her lover had been entangled he had at all events now broken his chains. If he had temporarily wavered in his allegiance there was at least good hope that rumour had much exaggerated his defection. This Mrs. Daventry could surely not be with him in the Crimea? Ladies as yet, so far as she knew, had not ventured farther than Scutari, where, if half the reports that came home were true, there was only too much for them to do, and the papers teemed with sharp remarks on the shame and sin of even allowing the few soldiers' wives to participate in such rough work as was now going on.

Mr. Harperley read the letter gravely and with no little interest. He knew now, as did every one else round York, that in the

race at Crockley Hill Cis Calvert had been the victim of a fraud, of which he was as innocent as any looker-on. But he had, as was very natural, heard considerably more about Cis's flirtation with Mrs. Daventry than his daughter. He was quite prepared, that business satisfactorily explained, to welcome Cis as a son-in-law, but he did think that things had better remain as they were between them for the present, that is to say, without any positive engagement, and without their corresponding until such time as the war should be over. He liked Cis, and was conscious that in his judgment about that unfortunate race he had wronged him. He was anxious not to fall into a similar mistake a second time, but he loved his daughter dearly, and was disturbed at the idea of handing her over to a man who did not really care for her. Cis's Indian flirtation might be mere gossip, unfounded rumour, easy of explanation, but he deemed it a thing

best cleared up before the old relations were renewed.

Having finished the letter he handed it quietly back to his daughter and said, "That all who knew Captain Calvert will be pleased, though not surprised, at his distinguishing himself is a matter of course ; there are plenty of his friends round here that this news will delight. He left us under a grievous misconception, and the majority of us know that we did him scant justice on that occasion ; but, Annie, although this Indian matter has never been touched on between you and me, still I know very well that it must have reached your ears, and I think for the present it will be wise to let things stand as they are. If he clears himself in your eyes on his return I shall give you to him with as much pleasure as I can give you away at all. Let us be of good hope that things will come all right in the end, and in the mean time, like hundreds of others, be content to wait."

When she gained her own room, carrying, one may be certain, her brother's letter, Annie sat down to think. She had been all but trying to steel her heart to think no more of this man. And now she did not feel sure but what all this Indian story might turn out to have been grossly exaggerated, should there even be any foundation for it. True, there was usually a suspicion of truth at the bottom of Mrs. Charrington's stories, but in this case it was only what she had heard from a country which, in those days, was practically very distant. Still flashed across her mind that thought which instinctively wrings every woman's heart, Why had he not answered her last letter? And such a letter! She was conscious that she had poured forth all the depth of her love for him in that epistle. If she refused to give him up, and showed herself desirous to continue correspondence, surely it was not for him to decline; it might be all very chivalrous to say that with such a slur upon

his name, as a man of honour, the only thing he could do was to resign all pretensions to her hand ; but like most women she could not, and she did not, think it was for him to decide upon that. Surely she was the best judge of a matter so nearly concerning herself, and when she elected to stand by him, let him have committed what crime he might, was it not for him to thankfully accept the sacrifice. Another thing she knew now, that no stain attached to his name ; and it was evident from her brother's letter that Cis also was now aware of that fact. Surely he ought to write to her now ; he could hardly expect that she should humiliate herself by writing to him again whilst that last letter remained unanswered. And then she too came to the same conclusion as her father, that there was nothing left for it but to watch the papers and wait. If he had really ceased to love her then she should hear of him no more, and it were

best so ; if on the contrary he remained true to her, a letter would come at last.

And then, like a true woman, she began to make excuses for her lover. She had not liked that chivalrous view ; she had held it was not for him to take it. And yet it was very noble of him too ; and of course first arriving at the Crimea it was all strange to him, and he must have had a great deal to do. Had not her brother pointed out the difficulty of carrying on correspondence in the plight they then were ; and now in consequence of his heroic conduct—of course it was heroic in her eyes—he was lying wounded and mangled. True, Harry said it was nothing serious ; that “he was not badly broke ;” but then that’s just the way men talk of these things. She could recall accidents in the hunting-field in which the sufferer had been reported “all right,” nothing much the matter, he has only broken his arm, two ribs, and a collar-bone. How could she

expect him to write when he was probably so badly wounded as to be in the hands of a sick nurse? And now her thoughts travelled round to the opposite point of the compass, and she began to ask herself whether it was not unkind, almost unfeeling, not to despatch a little note of sympathy to this man in his hour of agony. Even if he was no longer her lover he had been very near and dear to her only a twelve-month ago, and at last Annie Aysgarth finished up by doing what would be the natural end in such a case in a woman's reflections, that is, she sat down and cried her heart out.

At Byculla Grange, I need scarcely say, there was much discussion concerning Cis Calvert's gallantry. The exoneration of his character with regard to the steeplechase had occasioned a great revulsion in his favour. He had always been a popular man, and now people recollected his dashing horsemanship. If he had been one of the

first flight with the York and Ainsty, it was evident now that he meant to hold the same place when there was work to be done. Members of the York Club were conscious now that they had been a little unjust to Cis Calvert; that, although there were undoubtedly strong grounds for suspicion, there had been hardly sufficient evidence to pronounce a verdict against him; and then a man's previous character and social status should always plead for suspension of judgment in such a case. They were one and all only too anxious to make amends, and every one now spoke enthusiastically concerning him. There were of course plenty of such stories going in the journals in those days, but this sortie happened to create rather more sensation than usual from the fact that it took place at a time when the exhaustion on both sides had caused active operations to languish. Then again the picturesque costume of the Russian leader had made him quite a man

of mark—no more persistent scourer of the right attack trenches than he—and therefore it naturally came to pass that the man who had slain the Albanian became to some extent a man of mark in his turn. Through the Second and Light Divisions Cis Calvert's name and story were now pretty generally known.

“I always said I knew it all along,” exclaimed Mr. Charrington, as he threw down the *Times* at breakfast, containing an account of that night skirmish; “I always said Calvert would come out all right. Was it likely a fellow who rode as straight as he did to hounds wasn't likely to run straight all through? He's a glorious fellow, and the banker's daughter hardly showed her usual good sense when she allowed him to go packing off to India. I used to think at one time that she really meant to take him for good and all, and I've no hesitation in saying that I think she was a fool not to. Whether he did or did not ask her of course

I don't know, but I'm pretty sure he would if she had chosen."

"Don't talk nonsense, Robert," replied Mrs. Charrington a little sharply. "Miss Aysgarth had, or at all events I fancy will have, the opportunity of doing a good deal better for herself than that. You must recollect Major Crymes came into all his uncle's money just before he left for the East, and Annie Aysgarth can be Mrs. Crymes when he returns, I have very little doubt."

It may not be a very courteous or yet a very polished fashion of replying to a lady's speech, but Mr. Charrington simply gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"You'll be kind enough to explain that, Robert, although I know pretty well what it means."

"Oh, nothing," replied Mr. Charrington, with some slight hesitation, "only I did think—that is, I was under the impression that he admired some one else."

“Meaning me,” replied the lady with the greatest calmness. “Of course he did; some of them” (by them Mrs. Charrington described the male sex generally) “always do, but you know very well he couldn’t marry me, and that I’m a true wife to you, although I plead guilty to the womanly weakness of a love for admiration. If you had ever noticed anything, which of course you men never do until we point it out to you, you would have seen that I always provide my admirers with suitable wives,—a purer philanthropist never existed. Having ascertained by personal experience that a man understands how to render those *petits soins* so dearly loved of my sex, I then do him a good turn, and marry him off to the most eligible young lady on my list.”

“Good Lord! and to think that I have been living for the last fifteen years with a professional matchmaker and never knew it.”

“No,” replied the lady with a smile;

“your unobservant sex only awake, as a rule, to our virtues and perfections after you have lost us.”

But this was a little too much for Mr. Charrington. He was fond of and quite satisfied with his wife, but he also knew that she had occasioned him many a paroxysm of jealousy; that there were times when she could not restrain a certain crispness of temper, and that, though not altogether the unmitigated blessing she represented herself, they got on very well together; still there was that occasional crumpling of the rose-leaves unavoidable when two people make up their minds to dwell together in unity. He didn't whistle this time, but thrusting his hands in his pockets muttered something indistinctly about a cigar in the stables, and strolled out of the room.

He was wise in his generation, for to get into argument with a woman on the subject of her own perfections is, to put it mildly, inadvisable in the eyes of a sensible man.

But if Cis Calvert's late doings were discussed at the York Club, Byculla Grange, and the Firs, there was also a more humble place in which they were talked over, and that was at the Punch Bowl Tavern in Stonegate. The great Isham Boggs, who had not been lately seen in York, had once more arrived at that hostelrie. Isham had come up on one of his touting expeditions. That Mr. Popham had got a flyer for Epsom in Wild Dayrell was pretty generally known, but it was also rumoured that there was a colt in the north country stables which would take a deal of beating, and it was to inquire about, and if possible get a sight of, this animal, that was the object of Mr. Boggs' present mission. He was sitting in that bedroom on the first-floor, which he habitually used on his visits to the Punch Bowl. He was engaged, moreover, in that solace to his lonely hours which he specially affected, to wit, the consumption of gin, tobacco, and the perusal of the racing calendar. But

he was not alone upon this occasion. Mr. Blundell, since the departure of his late master for the Crimea, had relapsed into a mere hanger-on the outskirts of the turf. Isham Boggs might fairly claim to be the biggest scoundrel that had ever come within Mr. Blundell's personal knowledge, and from our previous acquaintance with Major Crymes' late groom we can easily conceive that his admiration for Isham was unbounded. To a man of Mr. Blundell's perverted morality Isham's villanies were simply strokes of genius: he had as much admiration for Isham's talents as if they had been employed in a laudable and legitimate vocation. Still it was not altogether his own choice that he had become what he was—the mere shadow and assistant of the unscrupulous Isham.

When the —th Lancers got their orders for the East the Major, as we know, got rid of all his race-horses, and had, of course, no further occasion for Blundell's services. Mr. Blundell, it must be remembered, had

borne a very shady character when Crymes first engaged him, and when the truth concerning the disqualification of the Mumper was, thanks to Mr. Charrington's exertions, brought to light, it became evident that Mr. Blundell had been, more or less, in the secret of the fraud. That he had called on Mr. Boggs at the Punch Bowl more than once, that he had actually been in the trap with him to witness the race, and had brought the short note to his master which had led to the Major making the suggestion, transpired during the inquiry. There was no tangible offence with which to charge anybody, but it was quite clear that Boggs and Dick Hunsley had originally contemplated an elaborate racing plant. What Hunsley's embarrassments had prevented their carrying out in one way accident had enabled them to carry out in another. That Mr. Blundell lent himself to the carrying out of Isham's scheme admitted of no manner of doubt; and under these circumstances it

was little likely that the Major's late stud-groom would get employment in Yorkshire. He was a man who had no fancy for working harder for his bread than was absolutely necessary. Like many others he had much hankering for the flesh-pots, but preferred their being filled with as little exertion as possible. To obtain a precarious living by assisting the great Isham in his continual villanies was much more in accordance with Blundell's disposition than seeking for honest labour; and that gentleman, who had always employment for two or three tools in connection with his nefarious schemes, had munificently appointed Mr. Blundell to that dubious position.

"I only wish we had that Mumper game to play over again. We didn't get half enough out of it."

"Didn't we?" replied Isham, contemptuously. "I made a very good thing of it; and as for you, it was the easiest earned seventy-five pound ever you picked up."

It's mighty little you was asked to do for it."

"Yes, but you know you said I was to have a hundred, and it really is dead low water with me now."

"Said you were to have a hundred? Ask any one who knows Isham Boggs if you wer'n't devilish lucky to get three-fourths of it? Folks don't as a rule care about discounting my promises to pay. Dead low water are you? Do I look as if I was going about in my private carriage? That's just where it is. Whenever I plan a little bit of successful—well, say industry,—and make a bit of money by it, I never can keep it. Most of what I got over that steeplechase I dropped at the back end over the October handicaps. Well, he was a rare good horseman was Captain Calvert, and it was 'hard lines' that he should have been hunted out of the country when he wasn't even in the swim."

"Well, I see by the papers," rejoined

Blundell, "that he's gone to the Crimea, and been in among them Russians. You think it was hard for him. We none of us know what is quite good for us. Who knows if he'd been with the regiment that Balaclava day whether he'd be alive now?"

"Now look here, my friend. I'll trouble you not to bother me with any more of your philosophy. If you think losing your money is good for you do it by all means. I know it don't suit me half so well as winning other people's."

"I don't want to quarrel, Isham, I'm sure. When do we leave this?"

"In two or three days most likely, but it all depends on what news I get. We've got this horse to see about, mind, and find out whether he's really any good or whether it's all gammon."

Mr. Boggs' mission was destined to turn out somewhat disastrously. He was fascinated by the north country colt that he had come up to see; put his faith in him

instead of the favourite, and the end of May saw him and Mr. Blundell completely beggared upon Epsom Downs. No very new experience to either of them, but more so to the former. Both of these worthies now fade from our pages. Their subsequent career shows how unevenly justice is served out to us in this world. Mr. Blundell became a mere jackal of the race-course; but as for Isham Boggs, like many other illustrious scoundrels, he made no edifying finish on "Tyburn tree," or, to speak more prosaically, in front of Newgate, but having come once more unexpectedly, through an exceedingly well-concocted robbery, into what was for him a bit of money, he succeeded in persuading a well-to-do widow, proprietress of a sporting tavern, to marry him. Isham had remote dreams of betting lists and unlimited gin; but his consort, before he could get the former on a comfortable footing, took an evangelical turn, sold out of the business, and rumour says that

the mighty Boggs turned teetotaller, and deaf to the war-cry of the fielders, has been actually seen in his advanced years holding a plate in a “ Little Bethel ” or low-church chapel.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TAKING OF THE QUARRIES.

It is an early March morning, and standing in the Quarries in rear of the left attack are a group of men, busily scanning the Russian lines through their field-glasses. Bearded, unkempt, and unwashed, it would have puzzled their dearest friends to recognize those dandy warriors wont to lounge in the park, a flower in their buttonhole, so often in the season.

“We don’t seem much nearer getting in,” observed a dashing officer now gone to his rest, but who lived to be a General before he died; “and mark that green hill that lies in front and a little to the left of the

Great Redan. What can our engineers be about? If we don't occupy it, depend on it the Russians will before many days are over."

It was probably more the business of the French engineers to take possession of that hill than our own. Our engineers might certainly have retorted that they had not sappers enough to trace the lines, nor could the infantry furnish either the working parties necessary to make the entrenchments, nor the covering parties requisite to defend them when they were made. If our gallant Allies were not quite in such straits as ourselves they at all events had their own troubles to contend with, but they kept them to themselves, whilst we proclaimed our sufferings to the world generally, including the enemy.

The first impulse of every Englishman, as we all know, is to write to the *Times*, whether his train is late, whether he is overcharged by his cabman, or whether he

has quarrelled with his wife ; and not only did the accredited reporter of the *Thunderer* send home his fair and unbiassed statements of the wretched state the army was in, but all sorts of correspondence in the shape of private letters from men in the Crimea, were published by their imprudent relatives, and the Russian Generals as they read these statements might well feel good hope of hurling the invader once more back into the sea. It became at last more a game of endurance than anything else : it was a question simply of which side could pour the greatest amount of men and material into those few square miles of the Crimea in which the struggle was destined to be decided. Steam water-carriage of course in the end beat waggon-carriage across the steppes, as it was bound to do. The soldiers of the Allies were at all events landed in the Crimea with practically no loss, but the Russian reinforcements wasted terribly during that long and terrible march from

the north to the southern extremity of her empire ; and, as was said, when the spring-time came, the navvies arrived, and the railway was laid down from Balaclava nearly up to the front, it at all events looked as if *we* meant to stay.

The prognostications of that member of that grimy group on the Quarry Hill were speedily verified. A week or two afterwards and the eyes of Allies were greeted with the first outlines of the Mamelon, destined to occasion considerable trouble and much loss of life before it fell into possession of the French. As the sap rises in the trees with the spring-time so was fresh life infused into the campaign. Both sides had received reinforcements of men and ammunition. That the stagnation of the winter had disappeared, and the work was once more to begin in earnest, was obvious to the most careless spectator, and that the first step must be the taking of the Mamelon by the French was apparent to

every one. One night the Zouaves burst over their trenches, hurled the Russians out of the Mamelon, and, carried away by their national *élan*, followed their flying foe to the very foot of the Malakoff; intoxicated by the elation of victory they actually meditated the taking of that work by a *coup de main*; but there the fugitives were promptly reinforced, and turning fiercely upon the somewhat disorganized victors, not only hunted them back to the lost entrenchment but retook it, and defied all attempts to dislodge them during the night. Pellissier, the French commander-in-chief, was, however, the last man to abandon a point upon which he had once set his mind. Once let him determine that the carrying the position was necessary, and he was ruthless of life in effecting his object, and that the Zouaves would have another opportunity afforded them speedily, was a thing of which there was little doubt. One afternoon it was whispered about that the French were once

more going to assault the Mamelon, and the dying rays of the April sun saw an anxious knot of British officers once more gathered on the Quarry Hill, with their glasses fixed on that irritating earthwork. Too far off to hear the yell with which the Zouaves once more sprang at the throat of the foe, one could just catch the faint notes of the *pas de charge* as they swept across the open, for all the world, as a sporting subaltern exclaimed, "like a pack of hounds being thrown into cover." The fierce, angry crackle of the musketry raged for a few minutes, and then the flat-capped Muscovites could be seen falling back on the Malakoff, and it was obvious that the work was in the hands of the French. This time their leaders succeeded in keeping their men in hand, and instead of following the beaten foe turned their attention to throwing up an entrenchment in the gorge of their new conquest. Rapidly that little group on the Quarry Hill break up and tear down to

the respective covering parties to which they belong, already falling in, for a hint has been given that they might be required to make a demonstration on their side, with a view of harassing the foe and securing the French in their new position.

From this the siege progresses rapidly ; the allies advance steadily, and the approaches are pushed closer and closer. Every inch of ground is fiercely contested, and the Muscovite will fight stubbornly the whole night to recover any loss of position. The French have in this instance an easier task than the English, insomuch as the latter are working on rocky ground, which of course makes the construction of the sap difficult, while the French in softer soil cannot only run their trenches more easily, but can obviously get much closer to the enemy's work than our own people. In the left attack, when they reached the crest of the hill overlooking the Barrack Battery, further advance was impossible,

and that a main assault should be delivered from that point had never entered the head of any of the chiefs of the Allied Army. The French had for some time believed that the way into Sebastopol was through the Flagstaff Battery, but the verdict of the English engineer, who if he could not see a joke was at all events a *connoisseur* in fortresses, was now pretty generally accepted, and that whenever the Malakoff fell Sebastopol would be virtually in the hands of the Allies was now usually conceded. As the French pushed on it became absolutely necessary that sundry of the Russian advance posts in front of the Great Redan should be taken by the English. From these positions the enemy's sharpshooters were able to enfilade the French trenches. The two most conspicuous of these points were a set of rifle-pits, subsequently called Egerton's Pits, and the Quarries, by no means to be confounded with the Quarry Hill, in rear of the left attack. Stone

quarries were somewhat numerous on the plateau, most of the materials for the building of Sebastopol having doubtless been obtained therefrom, and that these should at times be available as natural defences is evident.

That the siege was going on in grim earnest now there could be very little doubt. Hardly a week passed without, in the slang of the army, "a row in the ditches." From the obstinate fight the enemy had made for the retention of the Rifle Pits it was rightly augured that the Quarries would be a stiffish nut to crack. Poor Lempriere, although reputed the smallest officer in the British army, had shown that pluck is no matter of inches, and had died gallantly at the head of his company in the rush with which these pits were carried. His Colonel had picked him up in the first flush of their success, and carried the lifeless figure out of the turmoil, rejoining his men only to be in his turn also carried away a

corse before morning, victim to one of the fierce onslaughts made by the enemy in the course of the night for the recovery of lost ground.

A few evenings later and Cis Calvert, now gazetted a lieutenant, is parading with a strong party of the —th Fusiliers for trench duty. There is a rumour that we mean having the Quarries shortly, and to-night—

“A whisper’s caught up through the ranks as they form,
A whisper that fain would break out in a cheer,
How the foe is in force, how the work will warm :
But steady ! the chief gallops up from the rear.”

“Gentlemen,” said the field-officer of the trenches, addressing the group of officers lounging in front of their respective commands, with as pleasant a smile as if about to ask them to supper, “the honour of taking the Quarries has been deputed to us. Of course we shall get in, but remember we have got to *stay* in, and the enemy are not likely to leave us in the enjoyment of a

tranquil evening. All I have to impress upon you is this,—keep your men well in hand, and don't be tempted to follow up the first success. Remember our business is only to take the Quarries and keep them, and should you allow yourselves to be run away with by the idea that we can carry the Redan besides, we shall be likely to fall into the same mistake the French made in their first assault on the Mamelon." Touching their caps the officers were about to fall in, when the Colonel bending from his saddle said, "Oh, Arkwright, you're in command of the Fusiliers, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jerry.

"That's all right," continued the Colonel cheerily. "You know every inch of the ground, and you and your fellows will lead the attack; remember we must have the Quarries, and we must keep them. I'm promised plenty of reinforcements, and, by Jove, you know, we can't afford to have those Frenchmen grinning at us. If we're

not still there by sunrise to-morrow I for one shall be most likely past praying for."

"I dare say it will be a lively night, sir, but you can rely upon our fellows. We have got a good many old soldiers in our ranks still," with which words Arkwright turned and rejoined his men.

And now the covering parties wound their different ways steadily down to the trenches, threading the intricate maze of *boyaux* and parallels till they reached their respective stations. Jerry Arkwright halted his men in a species of *place d'armes*, formed in rear of the advanced parallel. Calling his brother-officers to him he said pithily :

"Look here, you fellows, we've got to rush this place as soon as we get the order. It's not far to go, and let's have no stopping for shooting till we get in. The men may use their firelocks then anyhow, but to fire prematurely is simply to call attention to the fact that we are coming,—that's all I've

got to say. Another chance for you, Cis," he answered, as he gript Calvert's hand; "there'll be promotion on Cathcart's Hill for some of us before daybreak."

Never a man understood better the old saying, "the more you look at a fence the less you like it," than the dashing chief in charge of the attack. Not the man he to keep his bulldogs in the leash. Not a quarter of an hour after they got into their places, when his voice rang low and clear through the trench,

"—th Fusiliers! forward! charge!

Jerry Arkwright, Cis Calvert, and three or four more sprang over the parapet, and like a wave their soldiers streamed behind them. Almost before the Russians had fairly discerned them they were into the Quarries. A fierce ten or twelve minutes' *mêlée* and the enemy were falling back pell-mell on the Great Redan, while the victors set to work under the auspices of an officer of the Engineers and his sappers, who had

accompanied the attack, to entrench the reverse of their new acquisition.

“Well done, Fusiliers,” cried the chief; “though I’m afraid, Arkwright, we can’t call it altogether a bloodless triumph.”

“No, sir, indeed,” replied Jerry; “poor Matlock is killed, Lieutenant Wilkinson I’ve sent back badly wounded, to say nothing of a good many of my men.”

“I’m sorry to hear poor Matlock’s gone, though when you play with the china you must expect to break plates. Ha! we have woke them up at last, and I fancy have ensured a hottish night all along the line.”

And as he spoke the Russian batteries open fire from the Malakoff to the Flagstaff, producing speedily retort from the lines of the Allies. Anon amongst the fierce roar of the artillery came the spattering of musketry, not necessarily indicative of an attack upon either side, but acute suspicion of it. Again and again on both sides did the lines blaze with the quick flashes of the

rifles, simply from the alarm that the foe was advancing to the assault. In one place alone was there an ominous silence, and that was from the newly-taken position and from the Russian entrenchments that faced it. Suddenly the Great Redan thundered forth with increased vehemence, shell after shell hurtled through the air, carrying more or less destruction through the right attack.

“Steady, lads, steady,” cried the Colonel in clear resonant tones. “Keep your men well together, Captain Arkwright; this is only the overture; the play will begin again shortly. They are coming on again before many minutes are over, and in real earnest.”

“Yes,” rejoined the Engineer officer cheerily, “the Russians are not quite the boys to take an action of ejection quietly, and, by the Lord! here they come.”

“Let them have it all you know,” cried Arkwright. “Use your rifles freely, men. Remember the more you stop before they

get to the parapet the less trouble you'll have afterwards."

Covered to some extent by the thunder of their own artillery, and despite the withering fire of musketry relentlessly poured upon them from the position they had just lost, a dense Russian column came steadily on. But the English on their side had by this time been heavily reinforced, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle of some ten or fifteen minutes only resulted in the enemy's reeling back shattered and discomfited. Another officer of the Fusiliers was carried campwards after this last sortie, finishing up his military career by what eventually proved the loss of a leg. Arkwright's prophecy that "it was destined to be a hottish night" was amply fulfilled. No less than five times did the foe come on and furiously endeavour to recover the lost position. The thunder of the big guns was well-nigh ceaseless on either side, and in the last sortie but one, Arkwright, who had handled his men with

great skill and gallantry throughout the struggle, fell, and was carried away apparently dead. When the sun broke the ground between the Quarries and the *chevaux de frise*, that covered the salient of the Great Redan, was dotted with little grey heaps, interspersed occasionally with scarlet, that, when the sun had set, had been living men. Black with powder and his eyes bloodshot with the smoke and carnage of battle, Cis Calvert mustered the shattered ranks of the Fusiliers, sole surviving officer of that party.

“We have got them and we’ve kept them, Calvert, though it has cost us dear. The relief will be down directly, and it will be for others to see the position is not lost, but, good Heavens! are you the only officer left of the six of you there were last night?”

“That’s all, sir. Poor Arkwright fell in the last sortie but one, and I very much fear that, except carrying him to Catheart’s

Hill, there is nothing more left for us to do for him in this world."

"Down on your faces, men," suddenly thundered the Colonel, as the shrill whistle of a shell fell upon his ear, albeit not showing the faintest intention of following his own prescription.

Another moment and a thirteen-incher had pitched into the group, but when the dust and smoke of the explosion had cleared away Cis Calvert and three of his men were down, though not the least in compliance with the Colonel's orders. The shell had issued a mandate on its own account, which had taken precedence of the chief's, to which, indeed, there had been no time to give effect. It was the last sacrifice to the holocaust of the taking of the Quarries.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAREWELL SHOT.

“THEY had sharpish work at the front last night,” said Crymes, as he entered the semi-mess tent of the —th Lancers. “I hear the —th Fusiliers got terribly mauled. Rumour says that every officer they had down in the trenches was killed or wounded. If you have nothing to do, Harperley, I’m good to ride up to the Second Division in the afternoon and inquire if Calvert is all right.”

“What was it?” inquired Harry, “a sortie?”

“No; we took the Quarries, but the Russians, as usual, made us fight for them

all night. I fancy the butcher's bill is pretty heavy this time."

"I'm your man," replied young Harperley. "Not only shall I be in a fever till I know if dear old Cis is all right, but I happen to have a good many other pals in the —th Fusiliers whom I should like to inquire after. But how did you happen to hear all this?"

"I was field-officer you see last night, in charge of the pickets, and the roar of the big guns and the rattle of the musketry left no doubt about their having stormy times at the front. Nothing of course came our way, nothing ever does. Cavalry are, I suppose, always out of it in a big siege. We have had our day, and until the d—d place is taken I don't suppose we shall have it again. Since the reinforcements from India arrived and the drafts came out from home we are strong enough to do something if we only got the chance."

"I'll ride up to the Second Division with

you after lunch, Major, with pleasure. Can't say I heard anything of the row myself. I had spent the night before on picket in the valley. It was my turn in bed."

That afternoon saw the Major and young Harperley riding into the lines of the Second Division. They found the Fusiliers something "like the dog that has fought, licking their wounds." Even if triumphant there can be very little feeling of exultation when a regiment gets cut up as severely as they had been on the previous night. The survivors cannot help feeling a little sad for those comrades who died by their side. One of the first who came forward to welcome them, with his head wrapped up in bandages, was no other than Jerry Arkwright.

"I'm awful glad to see you, old man," exclaimed young Harperley. "We heard on our way up that you were amongst the fallen. I can see you have been knocked about a bit, but I do hope that there's nothing serious?"

"No ; I feel pretty generally earthquaky at present, and had a mighty close shave. I was picked up for dead, but a quarter of an inch in these cases makes all the difference ; the bullet went through my forage cap, and just grazed the skull ; but our doctor says that, owing to its natural density, there's no material harm done ; however, it's been a bad business. Matlock was killed outright ; Griffith and Bradshaw are very severely wounded, one must lose an arm and the other a leg ; while poor Cis Calvert is knocked about all over."

"Good God !" exclaimed Harry Harperly, "you don't say it's as bad as that ? Where is his tent ?—we must see him."

"They won't let you do that ; the doctors allow nobody inside there," rejoined Jerry, in husky tones. "As the greatest friend he has in the regiment, I petitioned just to go in for three minutes, but I was told gruffly that looking after my own head and nerves was quite enough for me to do

at present, and that, moreover, poor Cis is still only half conscious. It was a shell, you see," continued Jerry, in low tones; "and the doctor won't as yet confess the extent of his injuries, but there's no doubt, poor fellow, that he's pretty bad, and that if they get him round sufficiently to send down to Scutari to be nursed, they'll be lucky."

"Well, I'm very sorry indeed to hear about Calvert," said Crymes, quietly; "I'm sure if you can let his old regiment know how he is going, we shall be only too grateful."

"No, thanks, Captain Arkwright; we won't get off," continued the Major, in answer to the mute interrogatory of Jerry's *bâtman*; very glad to see you came safe out of the *mêlée* yourself; but you must expect hottish times during the next few weeks."

Young Harperley said nothing for some little time, as they jogged leisurely home-

wards. The boy had not only strong personal affection for Calvert, but all that admiration that we only give to our beau ideal in those early days. He had felt the sharp severance from some of his comrades already acutely, and now it seemed that not only was he to lose the brother-officer to whom he had most looked up, but the lad knew that he would have this story to write to Annie.

Brothers, especially younger ones, do not as a rule know much concerning their sisters' love affairs, but Harry had been the confidant of both sides on this occasion, and was quite aware that Annie had parted with her heart in serious earnest. The two people he loved most dearly on earth were Cis Calvert and his sister, and to see those two married was one of the things he looked forward to with the greatest satisfaction.

Crymes, too, was thinking a great deal over the situation. That there was every probability of his rival being swept from

his path in real earnest he knew this time, and a few months back he would have ruthlessly reckoned up this as so many points in his favour in this love-chase he was pursuing. But the grim earnest of war had brought out in Crymes, as it did in many another such similar hard and worldly character, all that was best in him. He had always admired pluck, and Cis Calvert had shown a reckless daring in the trenches that the Major fully appreciated. He would have said now, with reference to Miss Aysgarth, "Let the best man win her." A few months back he would have remarked with a sneer, "All is fair in love or war; don't suppose that I'm going to neglect such chances as fortune sends me." Now it was in tones of genuine regret that he turned round to young Harperley, and quietly said, "That's a poor account we heard of Calvert; he must be badly hurt when they don't let his brother-officers see him; and the hot weather we are now having, it's

desperate odds against a man pulling through. Give him the best care they can at the front, both the food and the attendance must be rough. The ordinary hospital orderly is a very poor substitute for a woman's hand about a sick man's pillow; the sooner they can get him down to the banks of the Bosphorus the better. The sun beats through the tents now with a strength which is very trying to a man with all the fever of his wounds on him."

"Well, Major, considering the way you were knocked about at Balaclava, there's nobody entitled to speak with more authority; not, after all, that you were much troubled with the sun during your convalescence."

"No, by the Lord," said Crymes, with a low laugh; "there were days at that time when I think I would have paid a hundred a-piece for extra blankets. But look here, young 'un, you ride up and see Arkwright as often as you can; never mind what Calvert says, but ship him

down to Scutari as soon as he can bear the journey."

"Come," rejoined Harperley, "you took a pretty different view of things in your own case; your language was pretty strong and emphatic when we talked about shipping you down there."

"Never mind," returned the Major, shortly, "I wasn't half as badly hurt as I fancy Calvert is. If you care about him, do as I tell you."

The next day was mail day; all letters for England had to be in the hands of the letter-serjeant by five o'clock, and that afternoon, any one who had peeped into the cornet's tent might have seen Harry in his shirt-sleeves, struggling desperately with pen, ink, and paper. He was writing to his sister, and knew that he had to tell the story of Cis Calvert's last misadventure. He had a pretty fair inkling of what bitter sorrow this news would be to her. He didn't in the least know the rights of it,

but he had somehow gathered, since he met Cis in the Crimea, that there was a screw loose with their correspondence. He thought it was possible that pending the clearing up of the Crockley Hill scandal his father had sternly prohibited it; but of that Cis was now proved innocent, and as soon as this business was over they would all go home and set the bells ringing in York minster. That had been his impression, but the boy's face grew very serious as he recalled what Crymes had said on their way homewards. He himself had been gambling with death too long not to recognize the truth of what the Major said. What a lot of his friends had been returned badly wounded, and before three weeks were over he had stood by their graves either on the plateau or by the quiet hill-side, while the big guns of Sebastopol and the trenches sounded their solemn requiem.

Harry's letter would have been the cheery letter a young fellow like himself might have

been expected to write. The hardships of the winter were over, provisions plentiful—a very important factor in all campaigning, more especially at nineteen, when the appetite is healthy ; and yet when Miss Aysgarth read it some fortnight or so later, she felt instinctively there was a want of real cheeriness running through the preamble. Harry knew that in spite of all this fencing the real gist of the matter was to come as yet, and he “craned” at it as he never had yet at a big fence.

“You will, I know, be very sorry to hear that poor Cis Calvert is badly hurt. He was the last officer left (in the morning) of the lot that went down to the trenches over night of the covering party of the —th Fusiliers. One of the toughest bits of work they have had at the front for some time ; and poor Cis’s luck was real hard. He had escaped untouched through the whole business, and while mustering the remnant of his men previous to marching homewards, and

after the hot cannonade which had been carried on the whole night had virtually ceased, a stray shell splashed into the midst of them and knocked over poor Cis and three or four of his following. I am afraid, Annie, it's a bad business, for the doctors refuse to let either me or any other of his friends see him, saying, 'Indeed it would be no use as he is only semi-conscious.' We must hope for the best; but I shall be awful glad when I see the dear old fellow shipped off to Scutari. Crymes says it's not good for any one badly hurt to remain up here; and poor dear Cis I feel sure will do no more soldiering this year. He may not have been out very long, but, by Jove, he has done his share; and our Colonel vows that he will have him back in command of a troop of ours as soon as ever he is fit to be about. As I told you before, we never found out what a good fellow the Major was till we got on service. He rode up to the front with me to ask after Calvert only the other day, and seemed as distressed about it as any one of us. He told me only this morning that it was a great satisfaction for

him to think that he and Cis had shaken hands before this business. Good-bye ; love to the dear old father, and remember you need none of you feel the least uneasy about me ; us cavalry swells seem quite out of it for the present ; nor till the fall of Sebastopol is there much probability of there being any work for us.

“ Ever your affectionate brother,
“ HARRY HARPERLEY.”

Not much in such a letter as this, you will say, and yet the Crimean mail-bags in those days were plentifully sprinkled with such epistles, which brought hot tears into many a woman's eyes, and gave even strong men a choking in the throat when they found that either Tom, Jim, or Dick, would never again be seen on Ascot Heath, or help them through a magnum of claret at the Rag. And as this letter sped homeward through the Mediterranean it was destined to cross another letter bound for the Crimea, which did not reach Cis Calvert for many a week later

than it should have done. Annie Aysgarth after a sharp struggle had swallowed her pride on the receipt of her brother's letter. She could not hear of Cis in the midst of the strife without writing him one line of passionate sympathy. She felt, if anything happened to him, that she could never forgive herself if she did not give him one more opportunity of reconciliation, and then after that cry in her room was over she sat down and wrote one of those letters such as were penned by scores of women in those days—days be it remembered before the art of letter-writing was lost—now we talk through a telephone, scratch what we have to say on the back of a post-card, or condense it into the twenty words that can be sent by telegraph for a shilling.

“MY DEAREST CIS,

“Although you have never answered my last letter, and I did think that it at least merited a reply, I must write to you once more. They tell me that you

have forgotten me, but I'll believe it only from your own lips, or from your own hand. Still, even if it were so, I only know that you have once been all the world to me; and I know from Harry that you are now in the Crimea, and in the midst of all that dreadful fighting. It is hard to have both you and Harry there, and the mail, as you may imagine, makes me like many another woman turn sick for fear of the news it may bring us. If all is to be over between us, I at least deserve a kind letter of farewell at your hands. I dare not say more; indeed I am afraid I have already said too much. If my letter to Secunderabad ever did reach you it was cruel of you, Cis, not to have vouchsafed me a reply. Farewell, my own; yes, even if it is for the last time I claim the right to call you so. You were my own once; yes, all my very own that evening we sat over the fire at tea when you gave up the run of the season to ride home from Askham Bog with

“Yours ever,

“ANNIE AYSGARTH.”

Cis in the mean while is bothering the doctors not a little. They shake their heads over him, and concur generally that it is a very ticklish case, and that it is desirable to get him down to Scutari, where there are many advantages not procurable in those sun-smitten tents of the Crimea, as soon as may be. But that is where it is ; he is so desperately knocked about they cannot as yet patch him up sufficiently to stand the voyage down ; Cis continues in a comatose state that rather puzzles the faculty ; they cannot arouse him. When in their desire to awake the brain-power once more they permit the visits of Jerry Arkwright and one or two more intimate friends the result is still more disheartening. Cis gazes at them with lack-lustre eye, and it is difficult to understand whether he even knows them. Now and again he will open his lips, but it is very sparingly, and even then very little to the purpose. He apparently has but slight understanding of where he is, and

his wild utterances refer more to his Indian days, or the time at York, than his later experiences. True, ever and anon he would revert to that fierce evening in the Quarries, the feverish light would gleam in the lacklustre eyes, and in a broken voice he would say, "Steady, men, steady! here they come again! Hold your fire till I give the word," and then sink back on his pillow exhausted.

Endless were the kind inquiries made about him from the gallant Colonel, at whose feet it may be said he fell, and whose own escape was almost miraculous to all his particular chums in the army. Harry Harperley "bucketted" ponies unmercifully between their lines and those of the Second Division for news of Cis. Old Copplestone himself made more than one visit of inquiry. That he, Cis, had distinguished himself, I need scarcely say, he had no comprehension of. He hardly seemed even to recognize those few intimates who were allowed to see him, and

at length the doctors decided, dangerous though they admitted the experiment might be, to ship him down to Scutari. His soldier-servant was to go with him, and the doctor of the —th Fusiliers and Jerry Arkwright saw him on board ship. Harry Harperley, with something amazingly resembling an apple-core in his throat, was also present in the Balaclava harbour upon that occasion ; but utterly exhausted by his journey down from the front, Cis apparently recognized none of them.

“ Shall we ever see him again, Doctor ? ” inquired Jerry Arkwright, as they descended the ship’s side.

“ That’s more than any one of my profession could honestly tell you,” replied the surgeon ; “ I firmly believe I’ve done my best in getting him away, but it’s no use disguising that it’s a dreadfully touch-and-go case. I like and admire poor Calvert as much as either of you, but it’s no use mincing matters,—his life hangs on a thread.

CHAPTER IX.

SISTER ELIZABETH.

It is a good many years now since the great drama of the Crimea was played, but there must be many who recollect one of the first tragic scenes in that history, and can call to mind the burning of the 'Europa,' and how Willoughby Moore, after having seen the last of his Inniskillen Dragoons into the boats, perished in the blazing transport; pretty well the first sacrifice of life that, in our fierce struggle with the Muscovite. But there are many who do not know how quietly and unobtrusively his widow took up the cross that he had been fain to lay down, and did his

duty to her country. Miss Nightingale and her nurses constituted an army of strength to whom the soldiers of the Crimea could never be sufficiently thankful. But Miss Nightingale's mission was avowedly more to succour the soldiers than the officers; these latter, as might be well supposed, had more opportunity of taking care of themselves in their hour of tribulation than was enjoyed by the rank and file. Of course they took their place in the long aisles of the Scutari hospital, and shared the lot of their humbler comrades; but there was no special building set apart for their accommodation. It occurred to Mrs. Moore that this was a want she could well supply. With no little trouble she organized a band of nurses, and opened a convalescent home for officers on a lovely site some two or three miles from the big hospital, and many an officer, worn out by sickness, wounds, or the nervous tension involved in the perpetual trench-work, felt most sincerely grateful for

the careful, gentle tending that enabled him once more to take his place with his comrades at the front.

Leaning at an open window, gazing sadly over the blue waters of the Sea of Marmora, was a woman, still young, but whose worn, handsome face told a tale of trial and trouble. The dark hair was coiled quietly away under a plain mob cap, and the prim grey stuff dress and white apron were as rigidly divested of the faintest sign of coquetry as the garb of the early Quakers. Whether the lady at the head of the establishment knew the history of Sister Elizabeth or not was pure matter of conjecture; but what *was* well known to every one about the place, Lady Superintendent and under nurses, was that no more unflinching worker than Sister Elizabeth had they in that hospital. Zealous and untiring she moved from ward to ward, with her soft voice and almost caressing manner, whispering words of strength and consolation,

winning confidences, and melting strong men of the world sometimes to tears in their hour of weakness. She wrote letters for them to those dearly loved at home ; ah ! and took down dying behests too at times, and, save when she bade good-bye to some patient, who had for weeks caused her serious anxiety, no one ever saw a faint smile wreath the lips of Sister Elizabeth ; no one of the numerous sufferers whom her unremitting devotion had nursed to health could have been made to believe that the woman to whom he in the main owed his recovery had, not a twelvemonth before, been the most reckless flirt between the Himalayas and Cape Cormorin.

Suddenly the door opened, and one of the assistant nurses gliding into the room, said quietly :

“The directress wishes to see you in her room for a few minutes, Sister Elizabeth ; there is a very bad case just come down that will require the most unremitting

attention if he is ever to recover ; you are the cleverest and most untiring of all of us, and the directress, I fancy, means to hand him over to your charge."

"I will come at once, and only trust that Providence will be as good to me as it has been before, in like cases. Did you happen to hear his name ?"

"Yes ; Mr. Calvert of the —th Fusiliers ; it is the officer of whom all the papers talked so much about in the winter ; it's the man who killed the Albanian in that great sortie about Christmas."

Lizzie Daventry turned white to her very lips, and her fingers gript the sill of the window in a manner that would have left livid marks had they touched flesh instead of wood. For a few seconds she turned sick, and felt in deadly terror of swooning. Her teeth were clenched, and it was only by a desperate effort that she succeeded in recovering herself. As if she didn't know the whole history of that wild night's

trench-work ! As if the fullest report that she could possibly lay her hands upon was not one of her most cherished possessions ! As if her cheek had not flushed, and her eye sparkled as she read it, and murmured to herself, “ Loved him, yes ! the only one of them all I ever really loved. Loved ! Yes, and loved in vain ; but Cis, my darling, it’s a consolation to know that at all events I loved a *man* ! ” And now she was called upon to battle with death over this man’s couch. Could she do it ? Could she command her feelings ? Could she trust herself ? She had nursed, and successfully too, several cases probably as severe as this. Her heart had been filled with infinite compassion and pure womanly sorrow at the sufferings of her patients ; nerve, hand, nor watchfulness had ever failed her as yet ; but this was different. She had loved this man — nay, did love him, cared for him as she never had and never should care for another ; and experience had taught her that an

emotional nurse is decidedly not good for a patient.

“I will try it,” she murmured; “I cannot bear to think that other hands than mine should tend him here, and if I feel it is beyond my strength I will make a clean breast of it, and request to be relieved of my task.”

“Tell the directress,” she replied, as soon as she could master her voice, “that I will be with her in two or three minutes.”

She had purposely kept her face averted, and gazed seawards from the window while overcoming her emotion. This had occasioned no surprise to the assistant nurse, as alert though Sister Elizabeth was when on duty she was notoriously absent and dreamy when not occupied. A few minutes' interview with the directress, and Sister Elizabeth found that she was indeed to take charge of the man she loved. No sooner had she received her instructions than she glided down to the ward in which he had

been placed. She paused for a moment at the threshold to compose herself; she had never seen his face, she had never set eyes upon him, since that afternoon at Secunderabad, when she had dismissed him with her passionate kiss still clinging to his lips. She had doubted whether she should ever see him again, but it was probably the wild hope of doing so, mingled with the feverish desire to bury the past in oblivion, that had brought her to Constantinople. The real earnest work had done her good. The strange contrast it offered to the frivolous life she had previously led took her out of herself. For the first time this woman was living for others, and not for herself, and then where she was now she got the very earliest intelligence of what took place in the Crimea, and her heart was as much there as even Annie Aysgarth's.

Another moment and she was standing by Cis Calvert's bedside. She had looked upon a good many shattered specimens of

humanity since she had commenced her duties in that hospital, but this was the first time it had fallen to her lot to tend any one whom she had previously known. Cis's pale haggard face and fever-lit eyes shocked her dreadfully. She knew from experience that this man was sorely stricken. He was still in the semi-conscious state, which was the furthest the doctors at the front had been able to advance him on the road to recovery. He gazed apathetically round him as if entertaining the very mildest curiosity as to who might be about him, or what they were doing. He rarely spoke, and was very patient except in one respect—his dislike to any exertion was very pronounced; the mere fact of being called upon to take sustenance seemed to irritate him. A surgeon was standing by his bedside when Sister Elizabeth reached it, his fingers on the wounded man's pulse, and an empty medicine glass in his other hand.

“The moving him from aboard-ship has

taken it out of him a good deal. I've just given him a strong dose of ammonia," said the doctor in low tones; "and now I must talk to you about him for a few minutes. It's about as bad a case as we have had. He is awfully knocked about, but it is not altogether hopeless. An immensity depends upon the nursing. There is nothing, you see, to absolutely kill him if we don't let him slip through our fingers from exhaustion. He must have perpetual food and perpetual stimulant,—beef-tea soup, brandy, champagne, and ammonia must be always handy, and never leave him, if awake half an hour, without one or the other. You must exercise your own judgment about which it is most judicious to use. Pull him through the next week, and I think the chances are he'll pull through altogether. I'm thoroughly aware of your great value as a nurse; but this case will tax all your energies, and the minute you find it too much for you, you must let me

know, and I will of course see that you are relieved."

"You may trust me," replied Sister Elizabeth, in quiet, resolute tones; "if my nursing can save him it shall be done; and the minute I feel that the strain is too severe you can thoroughly rely upon my studying the best interests of my patient, and handing him over to some one else."

From this time Cis Calvert became Sister Elizabeth's sole charge. She no doubt did her share of nursing three or four of the unfortunates in the adjacent beds; but even the other assistant ladies and under-nurses who shared her labours in that ward were astonished at the unwearied devotion she bestowed upon Mr. Calvert. A few hours' sleep she was fain to snatch at times; but as far as endurance permitted Cis received neither food nor drink from any hand but her own. He never evinced the slightest sign of recognition; but still, purely mechanical though it was, Sister Elizabeth's

presence seemed to soothe him. A slight gleam of satisfaction would steal over his face when, after an unavoidable absence, she returned once more to that chair by his bedside in which she had passed so many vigilant hours of late. As for Lizzie Daventry, the control she exercised over herself was something marvellous. Again and again had it seemed as if the slender thread of life must snap; and often had the yearning to press her lips to his forehead proved almost irresistible. It was well perhaps that the presence of other patients in the ward helped her to restrain this impulse. Slowly, but, alas! very slowly, did Cis struggle back from the confines of the grave. The week the doctor had stipulated for had passed, and at the end of it he could only shake his head and say :

“Care, Sister Elizabeth, unwearied care, such as he is getting may pull him through, but he is very far from out of the wood yet. You never deserved more credit for untiring

attention than you have shown to your present patient ; but do recollect, my dear lady, you over-tax your strength. If I did what was right I should order you a week off duty ; but that poor fellow, I'm told, seems to miss you so terribly that I haven't the heart to relieve you for a few days as yet."

"Never mind me, doctor ; I make no pretence that the work isn't hard, but I can *bear* it so far, and will readily confess as soon as I break down."

"There's nothing like a woman for pluck," retorted the doctor. "And if ever a man ought to be a judge on that point it's a doctor who has taken a turn in the Scutari hospitals ; but remember, confess in time both for your sake and your patient's."

Doctor Barry was a shrewd observer, and although not a word had passed between him and Sister Elizabeth, he had some idea that Cis Calvert had been known to her in former days. I don't mean that he for one moment dreamt that there had been love

passages between them, but merely that from having had some previous acquaintance with him she took a strong interest in her patient.

Although Cis Calvert at last began undoubtedly to regain strength there was one thing that puzzled the doctors, and that was that it seemed impossible to arouse him from the apathy into which he had fallen. It seemed as if the mainspring of his life was broken : he ate and drank mechanically ; he sat at the open window, for he was strong enough now to sit up for a few hours each day, and gazed over the blue waters of the sea of Marmora with a far-away gaze that looked as if he barely took in what was passing before his eyes. Nothing puzzled Doctor Barry more than Cis's lack of interest in what was going on around him, and the question was whether the severe shock he had received had not affected him mentally. Still there were numerous cases on record in which the body had recovered

before the mind, and it might be that it was so with Calvert.

“If we could only rouse him it would be either very much for his benefit, or we should know the worst; but while he remains in his present state it is impossible to know the extent of the mental mischief.”

As for Lizzie Daventry, she had good reason to apprehend the worst. That this man had never loved her she knew; but then, considering what had been between them, he should still fail to recognize her seemed almost incredible. True, she was dressed in very different fashion from what he had ever seen her, and she had never allowed him to suppose by either word or gesture that she had ever seen him before; and yet she felt sore at times, that all the care and patience she had lavished should not only go unrequited — that she was prepared for — but even apparently unrecognized.

The fact was, that all Cis's mental faculties

had been utterly unhinged by the injuries he had received : he lived in a stupor. To this minute he rather imperfectly comprehended where he was. They had told him he was in the hospital at Scutari, but the whole thing was vague and undefined to him. He spent hours endeavouring to collect his scattered thoughts. How did he leave India ? How did he get into the midst of that *mélée*, where shot and shell hissed so angrily ; where rifles cracked, and sword and bayonet-thrust were so fiercely distributed ? Who was this woman who watched so tenderly over him ? He had seen her somewhere before, but where ? And then he would give the whole thing up as a riddle past understanding. After all what did it matter ; as to whether he lived or died, he felt quite indifferent. Dr. Barry was right ; Cis required something to stimulate his well-nigh dormant mind.

Still as the weeks slipped by, and he gathered physical strength, there could be

no doubt that Cis's mental faculties were also recovering ; very slowly, it is true ; but close observers like Dr. Barry and Sister Elizabeth could see that day by day he began to take more notice, that the dazed expression was fading from his face, and although still very languid and spiritless, his perceptions were evidently awakening. One morning there came a packet of letters from the Crimea addressed to Captain Calvert, Scutari Hospital.

They had been taken in the first instance to the big hospital, from whence they had been sent on to the branch establishment for officers, where Cis was slowly battling his way back to life.

"There is news come for you from the Crimea, Mr. Calvert," said Sister Elizabeth in her sweet low tones, as she glided softly to the window at which Cis was seated. "As they are directed 'Captain Calvert,' I can only trust they tell you your late gallantry and sufferings have been recog-

nized," and so saying she placed the packet in his nerveless hand.

He gazed vacantly at them, but made not the slightest effort to open the packet. She stood looking at him for some minutes, and then calling to mind that Dr. Barry had said what benefit a stimulus of some sort would probably be in the arousing of Cis's mental faculties, said quietly :

"Should you like me to read them to you?"

She was so much accustomed to do this for those in her charge who were badly wounded, as well as to write letters to their friends at home for them, that there was nothing in the least out of the way in her volunteering to do it in Calvert's case. She knew how he had sold out, and, volunteering again, had joined the Fusiliers as an Acting-Lieutenant. She had followed his career closely since, sometimes through the papers, and sometimes patients that she nursed had given her news of him, for Cis had made

his name in the Second Division as one of the most dashing juniors in the trenches. She hoped these letters contained the news that his gallantry at the Quarries had been rewarded by restoration to his old rank. Lizzie Daventry was a plucky woman, but if she had suspected what was before her, it may be doubted whether she would have volunteered this service.

“Thanks,” he murmured, “if you will be so kind. Stupid I know, but attempting to read makes my head spin.”

Sister Elizabeth broke open the packet, which contained three letters, one of which was unmistakably the hand of a woman. Sister Elizabeth selected one of the other two, and breaking it open commenced reading its contents.

*“Camp before Sebastopol,
August 10th, 1855.*

“DEAR CIS,

“GROUSE shooting just about to begin, and they can’t make it very much hotter on the moors on the 12th than it’s

getting here. Every one says we are pretty near the final go-in now ; in fact the waste on both sides is getting too severe to continue. The ordinary trench casualties are upwards of forty a day,—that's of course without counting sorties or other like dissensions. The French have got within about thirty yards of the Malakoff, and amuse themselves by pitching soda-water bottles charged with gunpowder, and a slow match run down the neck, into the Ruski trenches. And I hear if you're tired of life you've got nothing to do but to look over the parapet and you are in the next world in no time. A fellow who was round their advance trenches the other day told me he saw one of their officers just raise his kepi on a ramrod above the parapet and there were three bullets through it before you could wink. And now, old man, how are you getting on ? We all want to know, because you were a terribly broken affair when we sent you away. Do scrawl us a line just to say you've pulled through, or if you don't feel up to it yourself, ask either your nurse or your doctor to write for you.

“I’ve one bit of glorious news for you—I say *you* advisedly, because all our fellows, like myself, are very sorry about it, but we know you will be pleased, and we are not such a selfish set of beggars as to grudge you your well-earned promotion. The field officer in charge of the attack spoke most highly of your conduct. The chief strongly recommended you for promotion, and old Coppleston applied for you to fill a vacant troop in your old regiment. And, Cis, my boy, you’ve got it. We all congratulate you most heartily, but hope you’ll not forget the turn you did with the Fusiliers, and I’m bid tell you by every one that when we all get home you must remember in future that you have two regimental dinners to eat instead of one.

“Ever yours,

“JERRY ARKWRIGHT.”

A faint smile played over Calvert’s countenance as the letter was finished. He knit his brows and looked curiously at the reader, and Sister Elizabeth suddenly

awoke to the consciousness that he was paying far more attention to her than to what he had been listening to. She doubted indeed whether he had quite taken it in; still that interest of some sort had been aroused in him was evident. She picked up the second letter and commenced to read that to him. It is not worth while to give this *in extenso*. It was from Harry Harperley, and was jubilant with congratulations over Cis's coming back to them as a captain, winding up with anxious inquiries about his health, and an earnest request for a few lines as soon as ever he was able to write them.

And now there only remained that third letter, and Sister Elizabeth's usually cool, steady hand trembled slightly as she broke the seal. She knew intuitively, as women do know these things, that letter was from that girl in England, the love for whom had steeled Cis Calvert's heart against her fascinations. And she was right; it was Annie Aysgarth's letter she held in her hands; and

then she did what few of the men who had known Lizzie Daventry would have given her credit for. As Lizzie Daventry Cis Calvert would never have heard or seen that letter ; as Sister Elizabeth she nerved herself, and read it through unfalteringly to the end. And then, as she recognized the wealth of love that was in it, and that *she* had nursed this man back to life, only to restore him to her rival, she gave way, and could no longer restrain a slight sob. She was weak, it must be borne in mind, with the watching and hard work she had done of late ; and then through the whole of her frivolous life, be it remembered, this was the one man for whom she had ever had a pure affection.

Suddenly a smile flickered round Cis's mouth. Annie's letter had rekindled the dormant memory, recognition gleamed in his face, and in a low voice he exclaimed,

“ Lizzie ! ”

CHAPTER X.

CONVALESCENT.

DR. BARRY was struck next morning by the change in his patient. "Why, you are a different man, Captain Calvert, from what you were twenty-four hours ago. Only go on like this and we shall soon have you in the saddle again."

The doctor had heard in the convalescent house of Cis's promotion, and knew that he was about to be restored to his old rank and his own regiment.

"Wonderful what the intelligence of promotion does for them; that bit of news was the very stimulus to his mental faculties we wanted. It has brightened him up no end—eh, Sister Elizabeth?"

“That had nothing to do with it,” rejoined the Sister, quietly. “I know, because he was so weak and dazed that I read the letters to him, and more indifference than he displayed at hearing of his promotion was simply impossible. But you are right, Dr. Barry, he did get the stimulus, though it was in another form: he got a letter from the girl in England he is or was betrothed to, and that did for him what neither you nor I could effect.”

During the silence of the night Lizzie Daventry had once more become master of herself. There was no quiver in the soft voice this morning; no one could have guessed the sharp agonies she had gone through but yesterday. She had not seen Cis this morning as yet, having been in reality so worn out by her late long vigils and the violence of her emotions for sleep to have become a positive necessity, only arrived at by resort to a soporific. Now, however, she once more stepped noiselessly to his bed-side.

“Lizzie,” ejaculated Calvert, as he saw her.

“Sister Elizabeth, if you please, Captain Calvert,” she replied quietly; “remember I have buried my past; I will say no more than that you assisted at its funeral. From the day I set foot in Constantinople I began a new life. We have crossed each other’s paths for a brief space, and shall part shortly, never to meet again. I am glad that I have been of some use to you in your hour of need.”

“Use,” returned Cis, “I know that you have saved my life; I know that but for your unwearied watching and tireless care I should have died. I am too weak to say more, too weak to thank you at present, but, bear in mind, I know it.”

“I have done no more for you, Captain Calvert,” rejoined Sister Elizabeth, in low, measured tones, “than I have for many others. If I have watched perhaps rather more carefully over you, it was simply

that we have rarely had a case that required such vigilant nursing. You have rewarded me by the only means in your power, namely, becoming convalescent—I trust to be able to add, well again, before long.”

She lied, and she knew it. Done no more for him than others ! She had nearly killed herself from pure jealousy that another should hand him cup or smooth his pillow, but he must never know it ; his heart belonged to that woman in England. And then she wondered if any of those men she had fooled in India had ever suffered as she was doing. She thought of that young dragoon up at Simla, whom she had lured to his ruin at her husband’s bidding ; she remembered all the story of that gun accident on his way down to rejoin his regiment, and she knew that rumour said there had been very little accident about it, and that young Goring had deliberately taken his own life. She could recall now the agonized face with which he bade her

good-bye, and begged her to keep a ring he drew from his finger as a remembrance. But for her fatal smiles she knew that he would never have frequented her husband's play-table; and as she became conscious of the dull aching at her own heart she marvelled did men suffer like this? Suddenly she experienced a strange giddiness, and had to catch at the balustrade of the landing to save herself from falling. She had had one or two of these little attacks of late, and knew in reality she had been taxing her strength too highly; but she was resolute to complete her task, though she had not as yet considered what a crowning trial might yet be in store for her.

One morning, a day or two after this, she entered the ward, and found Cis Calvert with a pen in his hand, sitting dreamily over a sheet of paper.

"I am glad, Captain Calvert," said Sister Elizabeth softly, "to see that you are strong enough to write; I should hardly

have thought you were, and, as your nurse, hope you will make it brief."

Cis turned to her with a puzzled expression; the pen was shaking in his feeble fingers, and it was evident that the concentration of his ideas was a matter of much difficulty.

A sharp spasm shot across Sister Elizabeth's face, but it was gone in a moment. She knew now what she had to do.

"Would you like me to write that letter for you, Captain Calvert?" she asked: "you are still too weak to write it for yourself; and I've served as an amanuensis to many of your comrades under similar circumstances."

"I'm afraid I must ask you; I don't seem able to rightly recollect things somehow, and don't feel able to make this pen go straight."

"I will say all you wish," replied Sister Elizabeth, as she seated herself at the little table. "I must say it in my own person,

because, of course, whoever I write to will know it is not your own handwriting. Who is it to be to?" and Sister Elizabeth's head was bent low over the paper as she asked this question.

"Miss Aysgarth, please ; tell her how ill I have been, and all about me ; say my name is clear, and that I have never ceased to love her."

*"Convalescent Home, Scutari,
August 15th, 1855."*

And here Sister Elizabeth paused. How was she to begin this letter. She felt she could not write "Dear Miss Aysgarth." She thought for a moment, and then resolved to commence without the usual formula.

"I write this at Captain Calvert's request, who, I regret to state, although slowly recovering, is still as yet too weak to hold a pen himself. He was very badly wounded, and when we first got him here we entertained the gravest apprehensions concerning him ; but I think I may safely

say all that is past. And now for his message: he bids me tell you that his name is cleared, that he loves you, has never ceased to love you, and looks passionately forward to seeing you again when the work here is over. If I do not write at greater length, Miss Aysgarth will, I am sure, excuse it, for our hands are always full, and time is a most valuable commodity with us.

“Sincerely yours,

“SISTER ELIZABETH.”

Had poor Cis been capable of much thought he would have felt a little curious as to how his letter would be signed, but he had never quite known the extent to which scandal had coupled his name with that of Mrs. Daventry. He was in ignorance that in the Madras Presidency he was very generally supposed to have eloped with Lizzy, although they had not gone away together. This bit of gossip, however, had never reached Yorkshire, or else Annie Aysgarth's letter would never have been penned.

“I’ll read it over to you,” said Sister Elizabeth, “and then you will be able to see if I have said exactly what you wanted. Will that do?” she asked, as she finished reading.

“So many thanks,” replied Cis feebly; “but I want you to put in a postscript. Add that it is to your devoted care that I owe my life, and that I am as grateful as I have strength to be.”

Sister Elizabeth made no reply, and then with firm hand and unfaltering pen wrote her postscript. What she said was this:

“Captain Calvert has covered himself with glory. We are all very proud here of our soldiers in the Crimea, as no doubt you are also in England, Miss Aysgarth; but of none are we prouder than him.”

Her hand never trembled, her pen never faltered, and yet can crueller trial be meted out for woman than to have dictated to her by the man she loves a letter containing the avowal of his undying passion for a more

favoured sister? But though Sister Elizabeth showed no outward sign, it could hardly be imagined that her heartstrings were unwrung.

Three or four more days and Cis misses his nurse, and misses her sadly. Men sore shaken in nerve and body are wont to lean to an unlimited extent upon those who watch over them; more especially do they succumb to the kindly presence of a woman near their sick-bed. In answer to his inquiries he was informed that Sister Elizabeth was not well, and needed rest; the days glided by and still he saw nothing of his late nurse; but Cis was gathering strength rapidly now, and by persistent cross-examination of those about him he soon extracted the truth, namely, that Sister Elizabeth was seriously ill, and he was not likely to see her by his bedside again. Poor Cis, he puzzled in his still somewhat benumbed mind as to what he could do to show his gratitude for all she had done

for him. It was difficult to say ; but at last the inspiration came, and from that moment every morning there arrived for Lizzie a basket of flowers, the choicest money could purchase, with Captain Calvert's anxious inquiries about her health. And this perhaps was the brightest hour in Sister Elizabeth's day ; for her turn of prostration had now come, and she was struck down with low hospital fever induced probably by over-work and the violent emotion she had of late gone through. Dr. Barry from the very first did not like the aspect of his new patient.

"She has overdone it," he said, "in spite of all my cautions. I warned her not to over-tax her strength, and what the result would be of so doing. Now she has got this low fever, and a very limited amount of vitality with which to fight against it, I hope and trust she will pull through ; and mind," he said, turning to the attendant nurse, "she *must*. We cannot afford to lose

her. Should she go the wrong way she will have died for England as much as any of those who fell in the Crimea."

One afternoon came down that long deferred despatch which announced that Sebastopol had fallen ; how that the French had carried the Malakoff with a rush at mid-day, and had spent the whole afternoon in savage fighting in the Karabalneia suburb. How that the English got into the Redan only to be driven out again ; and how about midnight the Russians had blown up all their magazines and sullenly retreated across the harbour to the north side of the city, leaving a hospital full of wounded behind them. There was much jubilation in Constantinople, as may be supposed, and now the guns had ceased to boom in the Crimea, the cannon like the bells were resonant in London and Paris, and well might the Turk and Western Powers rejoice. If we had got Sebastopol at last we had undoubtedly paid pretty heavily for its possession.

Cis Calvert is limping along the terrace in front of the convalescent house two or three days after the news of the fall of the famous Chersonese fortress had reached Scutari. Although it was three months since he had been wounded he was still very lame, and could only walk with the assistance of a stick. He had been what is technically termed "hit all over;" and in addition to his crippled leg had but very limited use of his left arm. He reaches a bench, when with a salaam the young Greek, whose duty it is to bring him flowers, comes up to him and submits the daily offering he sends to Sister Elizabeth for his inspection. As he turns his head he sees two figures at the end of the terrace that make his heart jump. He passes his hand hastily across his eyes—is it all a dream? for he is aware that his head is still a little confused at times. No; a second glance, and surely it is Annie Aysgarth and her father who are coming towards him.

Cis grips the back of the bench hard. Crippled as he is he moves with no little difficulty ; and in the present whirl of ideas occasioned by the sudden appearance of his *fiancée*, feels simply incapable of moving a step. Another minute and Annie has sprung towards him ; her arms are round his neck, and her lips laid to his.

“ My dearest Cis,” she exclaimed, as she withdrew blushing from the embrace in which he had held her, “ it is something to find you still alive, although your poor face shows only too plainly all the suffering you have gone through.”

“ I can’t say how glad I am to once more shake you by the hand, Calvert. There are so many of the cheery lot I used to dine with in the old barracks at York whose palms I shall never clasp again. More than once I feared that it might be the same in your case, and that I might never be able to tell you how ashamed I, like many others round York, felt that we should ever have doubted

you for a moment. You are still terribly crippled, the doctor tells me."

"Yes," returned Cis as he shook hands; "but the doctor tells me that I shall be all right in time."

"Yes, Cis, dear," said Miss Aysgarth; "and papa and I have come out expressly to take you home with us. You can be of no good here till you are well again. We have had a talk with Dr. Barry, and he says total change of air and scene would be the best thing for you. And that, moreover, after such a terrible time as you have gone through it would be simply useless your attempting to go to the front again for some months."

"Another thing, too," chimed in Julian Harperley; "now Sebastopol has fallen, the general opinion is, after our late bitter experience, that it is too late in the year for further operations; and I hear the probability is that we shall winter where we are, and not commence the game again before

the spring; besides, you must remember that you are now back again in the —th Lancers, and those who should know at Constantinople tell me it is in serious contemplation to send all the Cavalry down here for the winter."

Miss Aysgarth seated herself on the bench beside Cis, when the Greek, who had been an impassive observer of the meeting between Cis and his friends, quietly inquired,

"Me take flowers as usual, sar?"

"What lovely flowers!" exclaimed Annie.
"Who are you sending them to, Cis, dear?"

"They are going," replied Calvert, gravely, "to Sister Elizabeth, the lady who wrote to you for me, and to whose devoted care I'm indebted for being alive at this minute. I am sorry to say that she is very seriously ill, and cannot help thinking that the unceasing vigilance with which she watched over me may have been in some sort the cause of it."

"Do you think they will let me see her,

Cis?" exclaimed Miss Aysgarth? "Do you think they would let me watch over and nurse her, and so endeavour in some shape to slightly repay the large debt of gratitude we both owe her?"

Cis thanked his sweetheart by a glance. "I can only say, Annie," he rejoined, "that the utmost you can do for Sister Elizabeth will never repay what she has done for me. As a man and a cripple I can only feebly express my profound sympathy with her in her illness by daily offerings of fruit and flowers, but you may be able to do more."

"And if I can, Cis, it will be done, never fear. I have got to look after you a bit, my own, of course; but the woman who has put her life in jeopardy to save you for me deserves every bit of strength and love that lies in me."

"Excuse me, Annie," interposed Julian Harperley, "but I think our unexpected arrival has been a little too much for Calvert in his present state of health. If

you are to turn nurse you must bear in mind the weakness of your patients."

"Oh, how stupid of me! Of course. Thanks, papa. Cis, dear, you must take my arm, and don't think that I'll spare myself about Sister Elizabeth if I am allowed to help. I am not always so foolish and inconsiderate as I have just been; thinking only of my own pleasure in once more seeing you, instead of your shaken health. Come, papa, beef-tea and perfect quiet is what he requires now, isn't it?"

And the faint smile with which Cis responded to the suggestion showed it was not made before it was needed.

CHAPTER XI.

SISTER ELIZABETH'S FAREWELL.

DR. BARRY began to be seriously uneasy about Sister Elizabeth. "Her weakness is extreme," he muttered, "and she seems to have no strength or vitality left with which to battle with this low, wasting fever." There was no light-headedness—simply utter prostration; but she seemed to grow feebler daily, and her life, like the sands of an hour-glass, seemed trickling steadily away. Miss Aysgarth was incessant in her inquiries, and begged hard to take her turn in nursing the patient.

"My dear young lady," said the doctor, "if we were short of help I would accept

your assistance with the greatest possible pleasure; but this is a very critical case, and you must forgive me if I prefer leaving it in skilled hands to trusting it to an unpractised person like yourself. I am sure, Miss Aysgarth, you would be unwearied, but, you see, you lack experience. Her noble devotion has been such that if anything happens to her I shall feel that I have lost the most precious life confided to my charge since I left England."

"If I may not nurse her will you tell her that I am here? She wrote to me in England about Cis—Captain Calvert. No; why should I be ashamed? I mean Cis. I am going to be married to him, you know."

"Well, I thought it looked a little like it when I saw you on the terrace with him the other day. Pray accept my hearty congratulations, Miss Aysgarth."

"Thanks very much, doctor; but it was Sister Elizabeth saved him for me, as

you know well, and as Cis knows also. Can you not understand how very anxious I am to help her in her hour of trial? Don't think for one moment that I wish to intrude my incompetent self when there are abler, but none more willing, nurses at hand. But, doctor, I do claim the right to be made unsparing use of, should you ever see the opportunity."

Day after day Sister Elizabeth grew weaker and weaker, and each morning brought not only fruit and flowers, but sweet, loving notes of sympathy from Annie Aysgarth to the broken woman: unknown heart-pricks that, could she have dreamt of, Annie would have cut her right hand off sooner than have written. But of course neither the doctor nor Miss Aysgarth could have the slightest idea of the petty stabs the latter was unwittingly dealing; while as for poor Cis, Sister Elizabeth's perfectly calm, collected manner had made him utterly forget that she had

once entertained what he would probably have described as a *penchant* for himself; and yet if he had only recalled that last scene with Lizzie Daventry in India, he must have been compelled to admit that a *penchant* rather inadequately described the feeling she had for him.

But the idea came now to Sister Elizabeth that she should never more leave the bed in which she lay, and with it a sense of relief and contentment that her weary battle with the world was so soon to cease. What had she to look forward to in this life? And she felt that the efforts she had made of late for the sufferers from the Crimea were some atonement for her previous career. Do not for one moment imagine that she was dying from a broken heart. She was sinking, as many another noble woman has fallen before and since, from low, wasting, hospital fever. But if hearts don't break, a heart-ache goes far to aggravate such complaints; and it makes a terrible

difference to the doctor's skill when his patient shows no desire of clinging to life. As the conviction possessed Sister Elizabeth that her days were numbered, there suddenly came upon her a strange desire to look upon this woman who had been preferred before her. The impulse to see Annie Aysgarth grew stronger daily. It would matter nothing to her now—the fierce jealousy that had once torn her breast was gone; she felt she could see this girl now, and place her hand in that of Cis's with a smile. Surely Miss Aysgarth would not grudge her one kiss of his lips before she died.

Sister Elizabeth's mind was at last made up, and on Dr. Barry's next visit she told him of her wish. The doctor fumed and fidgetted not a little; if there was one thing he particularly did not wish for his patient it was anything like emotion; and yet, only he was quite unaware of the fact, it had been administered to her of late in

matutinal doses. To see a stranger at any time he would have pronounced bad for her just now. But the doctor had some experience of woman-kind; he knew that she had taken considerable interest in Captain Calvert, and what seeing a man's acknowledged *fiancée* means to any woman under these circumstances he could pretty fairly conjecture. Still Sister Elizabeth was so persistent in her wish, that he came to the conclusion at last, refusal might do her more harm than an interview with Miss Aysgarth could possibly do. He knew how invalids sometimes fretted, and thought to himself that he should be able to caution Miss Aysgarth to exercise the greatest control over herself, so that, albeit somewhat reluctantly, he at length promised that Annie should pay her a visit about noon the next day, the period at which invalids are usually at their best.

“I have only one stipulation to make,” said Dr. Barry, “and that is, I must limit

the length of this interview ; you really, in justice to yourself, cannot afford to talk to any one for long, and shall caution Miss Aysgarth, and shall depend upon her adhering strictly to my injunctions."

Miss Aysgarth listened attentively to the doctor's admonitions, and promised to conform with them to the very best of her ability.

"Don't allow her to indulge in emotion, nor permit yourself to do so either. That you should feel strongly with regard to the woman who has saved your lover's life is only natural, and that Captain Calvert owes his life to her I tell you admits of no doubt whatever ; but, Miss Aysgarth, you must remember her life hangs upon a thread, and I should never have acceded to her request only I think that denial may possibly do her more harm than letting her see you. No woman in Scutari has done nobler service, no more precious life will have been sacrificed than hers if she dies ; her tenure

of existence is so frail that much emotion may kill her ; and, therefore, I must look to you to preserve a composure you will probably not feel, and to restrict your interview to a quarter of an hour."

Thus sternly cautioned, Miss Aysgarth was the next day ushered into the quiet room on the upper story where the stricken woman lay. Annie gazed with no little surprise on the pale, worn features which, if they had lost that majesty of beauty which had characterized Lizzie Daventry when we first encountered her, were perhaps more lovely now than ever, in consequence of the spiritualized expression gathering over them as she neared her rest. The dark hair was drawn loosely round the well-turned head, for her illness had been such as necessitated no despoilment of her tresses, and Miss Aysgarth stood simply amazed at Sister Elizabeth's appearance. No one had ever hinted to her that this woman was beautiful, and yet Annie thought that she had

never seen anything more lovely than this sick nurse. On a small table by the bedside were a bunch of grapes and the flowers which Cis Calvert had sent that morning.

"Miss Aysgarth," said Lizzie, in a low tone, "will you come and sit, please, by my bedside? I have wanted so much to see you, and had to plead so hard before Dr. Barry would allow it. He meant it for the best, but I have a presentiment that nothing will make much difference to me now. Don't think for one moment that I have any wish to die, but I feel quite resigned to death should Heaven please it."

"I trust," interposed Anne, "that though you are doubtless very ill you are destined to be saved, even as you have saved so many others. Dr. Barry knows that I am at his disposal should there be any question of extra nursing."

"Thank you, no; every possible care is taken of me, my slightest wish attended to; I wish to see you, Miss Aysgarth, because I

wanted to see the woman for whom I had saved Captain Calvert. No man ever loved a woman more dearly than he loves you. He is true to you as steel. But a year ago, and I was counted handsome. It is over, and I can tell it you all now. If I could have won your lover from you, Miss Aysgarth, I would, but he never wavered in his allegiance, and I, who had never failed before to bring any man to my feet I wished, was fain to confess myself defeated. Can you guess now why I sent for you?"

"I think so," replied Annie, as the tears gathered in her eyes. "I can understand your wishing to see me, and from the bottom of my heart I am grateful to you for affording me the opportunity of thanking you for all you have done for me. I shall owe to you what I hold most precious in this world." Here her voice faltered, and she paused for a second before gasping out—"Cis."

Oh Annie, Annie!—is this complying

with Dr. Barry's injunctions about not giving way to any emotion?

"No," replied Sister Elizabeth, "I want more than that from you; I have told you that in the insolence of my beauty and the madness of my passion, I did my very best to win your lover from you. I have told you that I failed utterly. I have endeavoured to honestly make what atonement I could for trying to wrong you. Can you lay your lips to mine and say that you forgive me this attempted wrong? Remember I ask it as one who must shortly kneel before Him by whom all sins are forgiven."

Dr. Barry's injunctions were scattered to the winds. Annie Aysgarth with the tears streaming down her cheeks had fallen by the bedside, and pressed her lips passionately to those of Sister Elizabeth.

Dr. Barry, whose anxiety about Sister Elizabeth had caused him to hover restlessly in the vicinity of her room, began to glance impatiently at his watch.

“Seventeen minutes,” he murmured ; “I really can’t allow any more ; I was a fool to allow it in the first instance. That Miss Aysgarth will get to thanking Sister Elizabeth for saving her lover’s life is a matter of course, and then they’ll both begin to cry about it. And that poor lady, with only about enough strength to keep her alive, and not a particle to spare for scenes. I shall go and interrupt them at all hazards. If they hav’n’t got their talk over by this time, at all events they ought to have.”

Dr. Barry’s sharp tap at the door made Annie Aysgarth spring quickly to her feet, and it was hopeless for Annie to conceal either her tears or the emotion under which she laboured.

“Miss Aysgarth,” said the doctor in a very determined voice, “you have broken your promise ; I must insist upon the immediate termination of this interview. What you two women have been saying to each other of course I can’t conjecture, but this

conversation has done my patient no good I'm quite certain."

Annie did not trust herself to speak, but pressed Sister Elizabeth's hand, and mutely left the apartment in obedience to the doctor's behest.

"It's too bad," growled the doctor as he approached Sister Elizabeth's bedside; "if there's one thing, my dear lady, that I want, it is that you should husband the little strength you have left. Scenes take it out of one, and that's just what you two ladies have been indulging in."

"Doctor," replied Lizzie, as she stretched out her hand to him, "it matters very little now; all that can be done for me I know has been, and will be, done by you, but don't deceive yourself; I know when I leave this bed it will be only for that colder and narrower one in which we must all some day lie. I'm sure you would wish your poor assistant's last days to be spent as tranquilly as possible. You must be good

to me—I want to see Miss Aysgarth daily—to know her as well as my brief stay in this world will permit. Promise me I shall have my way in that.”

“The devil’s in the women,” muttered the doctor, not without a suspicion of tears in his own eyes at hearing his favourite nurse endorse a terrible thought which he had for days been struggling to combat, namely, that she was destined to succumb to the low fever from which she suffered. “My dear lady, you know I wouldn’t deny you anything except for your own good. Still it is my duty as your physician to say that the quieter you are kept the better.”

“Quite so, doctor,” replied Sister Elizabeth, in a voice which if low was perfectly resolute. “Still you will do as I wish, and I say emphatically I must see Miss Aysgarth every morning. No one can be more sensible of all the care and kindness you bestow upon me than I am, but you will do as I ask, even if it is against your own convictions. There,

leave me now ; you will do what I tell you I know ; I am tired."

Dr. Barry walked down-stairs more sad than perhaps he had ever left any patient's bedside previously, but from henceforth there were no further restrictions on Miss Aysgarth's visits, and not a morning passed that Annie did not spend some time in the room of the dying woman.

But the mornings, alas ! were few, and even sanguine Dr. Barry could no longer shut his eyes to the fact that his patient was doomed. Ere ten days had come and gone, when Miss Aysgarth took her accustomed place by the bedside, Lizzie whispered in reply to her kiss of greeting :

"It is very near the end now, and if you don't mind I should so like to say good-bye to Cis ; you won't grudge me one last interview."

"Grudge you," returned Annie ; "think of what I owe you. I believe, from the bottom of my heart, and I know all the

people here would say the same, that you would have given your life for his. Cis, believe me, would have come to see you long before had he been allowed."

Only another morning or two and Annie leads Cis up the staircase, and conducts him to Sister Elizabeth's bedside. The stricken woman greets him with a faint smile as she stretches out her hand.

"I could not go, Cis, without wishing you good-bye. Your betrothed has been an infinite solace to me during the last few days. Women have been jealous enough of me in days gone by," she continued, with just a spark of the old coquetry; "but no one, I think, can feel that of me now. You won't refuse, Annie dear," she added, turning her eyes wistfully towards Miss Aysgarth, "to allow me to say good-bye to him alone."

Miss Aysgarth's sole reply was simply a pressure of the thin fingers, and then she silently left the room.

“It’s been a hard world to me, Cis,” murmured Lizzie, as she stole her hand into his. “I know I’ve not been a good woman. I don’t want to justify myself altogether at the expense of others; but, as you know, I was thrown a mere school-girl into Anglo-Indian society, and that is rather a thorny road for any one as young as I was to travel under such guidance as was vouchsafed me. My husband caught my fancy, but no one ever touched my heart till I met you. To have won you I’d have staked everything. My fair fame, position—but why repeat the old story? You can remember what I said at Secunderabad; and I would have done it without a second thought. It’s far better as it is, Cis, dear. I’m going home fast, and it is a comfort to me to think that this one true love of mine was pure and unstained. Indian scandal travels home, we know; and whether Annie Aysgarth ever heard your name coupled with mine I can’t say; but she knows from my own lips that you never

swerved in your allegiance, though I confess to having done my best to win you from her."

"You know, Lizzie, that when we met I had no love to give. You were the greatest solace to a sore-tried, broken man amidst a community he disliked, and in a country he detested. What you have done for me here, I, as well as all the hospital, know. But for you and your unwearying care I should probably not be alive at this minute, and my bitterest thought at present is that you may pay the penalty of that devotion."

A sweet smile stole over the dying woman's face as she murmured :

"Never call it a bitter thought, Cis. I should like your wife to say in days to come, Sister Elizabeth gave her life for him, and would have given ten if she had had them. Now kiss me once, dearest, and then say good-bye. I am very weary, and shall be glad to be at rest."

Cis leant over the bed and pressed his lips to those of Lizzie Daventry.

"Good-bye," she murmured, "for ever. Send Annie to me for a little while."

Cis walked into the corridor and motioned silently to Miss Aysgarth, for the brine was in his eyes, and there was a strange choking in his throat, which forbade him to trust his voice.

And when the sun rose next morning Sister Elizabeth lay cold and still, locked in the dull apathy of death. If her past life in India was not good to look back upon, surely she made ample atonement by the noble work she did in the Scutari Hospital.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE dark-blue waters of the Bosphorus danced in the October sunlight as they swirled past the Seraglio Point, and hastened to pour themselves into the Sea of Marmora, which glistened like a silver lake 'neath the golden beams. On a small grassy plateau at a little distance from the hospital, which was already decorated with a sad sprinkling of memorial crosses, stood bare-headed a little knot of people, who had come to bid Sister Elizabeth a final farewell. Julian Harperley was there, as was also Miss Aysgarth. Cis Calvert also stood there with moist eyes. He had managed

to hobble to that grave-side with the assistance of his *fiancée's* arm and a stick. He believed implicitly that the dead woman had given her life for his. Dr. Barry also stood by that open grave with a twitching of the mouth as he listened to the solemn words of the Burial Service, highly unprofessional, but indicative of the high esteem in which he had held Sister Elizabeth. Ten or a dozen bare-headed men and boys were also present, and the tears stole from the eyes of more than one of them as they thought of all they owed to her who was gone. Several of the staff of the hospital were also present to pay this last tribute to their friend.

A handful of mould drops upon the coffin as Sister Elizabeth is laid to her rest — “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes.”

Sadly did the little group of mourners disperse, and Julian Harperley would fain have given immediate orders for the handsome marble cross destined to mark the

grave; but he speedily found that he was not to be allowed to do this by himself. Many of Sister Elizabeth's old patients insisted upon contributing towards a stone to her memory, and finally, a very handsome granite obelisk marked the last resting-place of poor Lizzie Daventry.

There seemed no reason now why Julian Harperley and his daughter should not at once take their invalid home with them. He was quite well enough to bear the voyage, and Dr. Barry even said it would be beneficial to him; but the banker lingered in the faint hope of catching a glimpse of his son. He had ascertained from undoubted authority that the cavalry were to be sent down from the Crimea for the winter; and this resolution once come to it was not likely the authorities would delay putting it into execution. The winter was fast closing in upon them, and the bitter experience of last year had shown that the traditional turbulence of the Euxine was no

exaggeration. So he and Annie had secured a ramshackle house in the vicinity of the hospital, and there, with the assistance of some servants picked up in Constantinople, they managed to bivouac somehow.

Miss Aysgarth was sitting lost in day-dreams, an unheeded book lying open in her lap, when a pair of arms were suddenly thrown round her neck, and a boisterous kiss imprinted on her cheek.

“Oh, Cis dear,” she murmured, “how did you manage to get up-stairs without help?”

“Cis dear,” replied her brother’s laughing voice; “it’s some one infinitely dearer and more precious than Cis. My dearest sister, look round and then return thanks to Providence that your brother is restored to you.”

“How glad I am to see you, Harry,” replied Annie, as jumping up she turned round and warmly reciprocated her brother’s embrace. We have been lingering here just to have a peep at you before returning

home. Papa will be so pleased!—have you seen him?”

“No; we only got in about two hours ago. Should never have known you were located this side if it had not been for a jolly old cock of a doctor. He came on board as soon as we anchored, and as soon as he found out we were the —th Lancers he told us Cis was all right again. Then he asked for me, and told me you and the father were living this side. I thought, of course, you were living on the other. I got leave from the chief to come off with Dr. Barry as soon as he had finished business. The regiment don’t land till to-morrow.”

“How bronzed you have got, Harry,” said Miss Aysgarth; “and you really have a moustache now.”

“That’s like your sisterly impudence,” rejoined Harry; “just as if I hadn’t when I left York.”

“A girl would never have discovered

it, though you kissed her," said Annie, laughing.

At length Mr. Harperley made his appearance. He had been on board ship to look for his son, only to ascertain that his son had gone on shore to look for him. But they had met at last, and now the three indulged in an unrestrained gossip, during which Harry gave his opinions about the course of the campaign with a confidence and freedom that would have electrified the Allied Generals, could they have heard him.

"Get in," said the boy; "of course we could have got in when we first came up there; all the infantry fellows say so, only the Generals couldn't make up their minds to try it. Balaclava, of course, was a beastly mistake, except for one thing."

"And what was that?" inquired his father, not a little amused at the crowing of his own cockerel.

"Why, we cavalry chaps would have been right out of it but for that; it is

the only chance we have had. Dash it," he continued, "we always are out of it. Here they are, having dog-hunts, private theatricals, steeplechases, rides through the Baidar valley to the Poros Pass, and all sorts of fun, and here we are sent down to this disgusting old graveyard."

Again the banker laughed; his sense of humour was tickled by the boy's off-hand criticism; but at the same time he felt no little fatherly pride in the idea that this saucy son of his was one of the famous Six Hundred.

Suddenly Harry stopped in his military criticism, and exclaimed:

"But look here, I must see dear old Cis! Upon my word, if I go back without having seen him, I believe the fellows will run me up at the yard-arm. Walk down to the hospital with me, won't you?"

"All right, Harry," exclaimed Miss Aysgarth. "One moment, while I get my hat, and then we will walk down and see

Cis. He is still very lame, you know, and has by no means recovered the use of his bridle-arm, but he will be awfully glad to see you."

"Not so glad as I shall be to see him, for, as I dare say you can guess now, when Jerry Arkwright and I put him on board ship we felt very doubtful whether we should ever see him again in this world."

So the trio walked down to the hospital, where Cis was most unfeignedly glad to see his old comrade. He thoroughly enjoyed the long chat about the doings at the front, and the story of the fall of Sebastopol. There were old friends to ask after, and to inquiries about some of them came the sad response that they were quietly sleeping on Cathcart Hill. At last Harry Harperley sprang to his feet, and exclaimed as he wrung Cis's hand:

"Well, good-bye, old man; it's awfully jolly to see you becoming your old self again. I must be off, and get on board

at once, for we disembark to-morrow, and the chief, as you know, don't stand over-staying leave, under such circumstances. The fighting all done with for the present, we are going to have a real gentlemanly winter this year, if only in contradistinction to the one we passed last. Like Julius Cæsar and all the other ancient military swells, we have gone into winter-quarters, and mean to refrain from punching each other's heads till the primroses are about again. But I fancy things will be lively enough when the spring comes round. And now, once more, good-bye, old fellow."

They all shook hands with Cis, and Julian Harperley and Annie walked with the young Lancer to the landing-place, saw him jump into a caique, and recede rapidly in the brilliant moonlight, on his way to the transport. They stopped for some few minutes watching the glittering showers that fell from the oars of the sturdy Greek boatmen, and then turned and walked hap-

pily home. For the present the banker and his daughter had cause for much heart-felt satisfaction; had they not got the two near and dear to them safe out of the hurlyburly for the present?

A week passed pleasantly away, while Mr. Harperley and Harry did all the lions of Constantinople and its neighbourhood. Miss Aysgarth devoted herself to taking the greatest care of Cis, who she was still sure required the utmost attention. At the end of that time the banker and his daughter and Calvert embarked for England, leaving the young Lancer behind them in a by no means depressed state; a cavalry race meeting was already in active organization, and that consoled Harry in some measure for the lost dog-hunting delights of the Crimea.

Dr. Barry proved right, and thanks to the fresh sea-air and the thorough change of scene Cis picked up strength rapidly. Still he was very lame, and bore unmistakable tokens of the severe illness through

which he had passed, when his *fiancée* carried him triumphantly home to the Firs with her. No sooner was it known round the country-side that Captain Calvert was engaged to Annie Aysgarth, and staying with the banker, than all his old acquaintance hastened to call upon him. The country was proud of her heroes in those days as these, and not only was this one who had distinguished himself, whom they had all known, who was about to take to himself a wife from amongst them, but to whom also they owed some little reparation for having doubted him concerning that unfortunate business at Crockley Hill. Annie was at first made supremely happy by the revulsion of feeling in her lover's favour, but soon she began to get much disquieted about the state of his health. A man does not go so near the verge of the grave as Cis Calvert and recover in a few months. The cold of the winter tried him severely, and as is so often the case, the maimed

limbs were very susceptible to rheumatic affection. The arm he was slowly recovering the use of, but the doctor said that he would assuredly limp to his dying day.

Nobody had welcomed Cis home more cordially than the Charringtons. If the lady was an embroiderer she was at all events not a malicious one. And though she had been only too willing to believe in both the York and Indian stories to Cis's detriment, yet she really was glad to find they were unfounded. Then she had all the interest a woman invariably feels in an engagement, albeit Miss Aysgarth had not plighted her troth to the man she, Mrs. Charrington, had selected for her. As for Charrington, he would sit and talk Crimea with Cis as long as he could induce him to descant upon the subject. He even buried his jealousy of Crymes when he heard how ruddily gilt was his sabre when he returned from that terrible ride up the valley of Balaclava.

But as the spring-time came round Cis began slowly to recover the lee-way he had lost in the winter, and at the same time the papers teemed with rumours of peace. There could be very little doubt about it now ; an armistice had already been agreed upon, and the remainder was pretty well a matter of detail. That the evacuation of the Crimea and the return of the army would be a mere matter of time was certain.

And now Julian Harperley began to urge upon his son-in-law, that was to be, a desire that lay near his heart. He could not quite bear the idea of parting with his daughter, and what he was very anxious for was that Cis should leave the service, make the Firs his home, and come into the bank as his partner. He knew that it was not good for a man to have nothing to do, but the war was all over, and though Cis was not incapacitated from resuming his profession, still he was undoubtedly lame, and so at a considerable disadvantage in

it. He could ride fairly, but not as he once did; and, moreover, although sufficiently at home in the saddle when he got there, he could not at present get up without the assistance of a horse-block or some such aid. Annie strenuously supported her father's arguments; her heart had lived too much in her mouth during the last year not to make her wish that Cis should have done with the service. So at length it was settled that as soon as the regiment came home Calvert should send in his papers, and the wedding-bells be set a-ringing.

With the early June days the Crimean army began to swarm home. Transport after transport poured alongside the dock-yards of Portsmouth and Devonport, and discharged their living freights. As much as could be collected of the infantry, at all events, bronzed and bearded, paraded in the drizzle at Aldershot to receive the thanks of their Sovereign. And a perfect
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swirl of spray flew from the bear-skins of the Guards as they cheered Her Majesty in response. That once got over, leave was granted pretty freely to the officers of the Crimean army, and Harry Harperley speedily made his appearance at the Firs. They had been only waiting for this, and a fortnight after his arrival Cis Calvert and Annie Aysgarth were duly united in the Minster.

One of the handsomest presents that the bride received upon the occasion was a diamond-and-cat's-eye bracelet, presented by Major Crymes. The Major has never married, but hunts pretty regularly with the York and Ainsty, and there is no more valued or constant guest at the Firs, when he is in the neighbourhood.

THE END.

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